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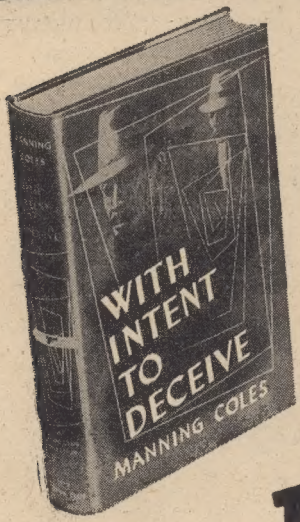

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Q. Patrick is one of the three pseudonyms used by the writing team of Richard W. Webb and Hugh C. Wheeler. Their other two pen-names are Patrick Quentin and Jonathan Stagge. Under the Q. Patrick signature this famous collaboration produces the Timothy Trant tales and those brilliant tours de force which reveal the authors' preoccupation with morbid and macabre child psychology — "Portrait of a Murderer" in "Harper's" of April 1942; "Witness for the Prosecution," one of last year's prize-winning stories; and "Little Boy Lost," to appear soon in EQMM. As Jonathan Stagge they write the Dr. Hugh Westlake novels; and as Patrick Quentin they created Peter and Iris Duluth, one of the really topnotch husband-and-wife detecting duos. Both halves of the collaboration are English born, both are now American citizens, and both are members-in-best-standing of Mystery Writers of America, Inc. Under all three "aliases" Messrs. Wheeler and Webb have consistently maintained a high standard of craftsmanship: they are front-rank performers, plot-wise and style-wise, in both meanings of the phrase. At the time of this writing they are wintering in Mexico, the scene of "Love Comes to Miss Lucy." . . .

LOVE COMES TO MISS LUCY

by Q. PATRICK

THEY sat around the breakfast table, their black coats hanging sleevelessly from their shoulders in the Mexican tourist fashion. They looked exactly what they were — three middle-aged ladies from the most respectable suburbs of Philadelphia.

"*Mas cafe*," demanded Miss Ellen Yarnell from a recalcitrant waitress. Miss Ellen had travelled before and knew how to get service in foreign countries.

"And *mas* hot — *caliente*," added Mrs. Vera Truegood who was the oldest of the three and found the mornings in Mexico City chilly.

Miss Lucy Bram didn't say anything. She looked at her watch to see if it was time for Mario to arrive.

The maid dumped a tin pot of luke-warm coffee on the table.

"Don't you think, Lucy," put in Ellen, "that it would be a good idea if we got Mario to come earlier in the morning? He could take us out somewhere so we could get a nice hot breakfast."

"Mario does quite enough for us already." Miss Lucy flushed slightly as she spoke of the young Mexican guide. She flushed because her friends had teased her about him, and because she had just been thinking of his strong, rather cruel Mexican legs as she had seen them yesterday when he rowed them through the floating gardens of Xochimilco.

Miss Lucy Bram had probably never thought about a man's legs (and certainly not at breakfast time) in all her fifty-two years of polite, Quakerish spinsterhood. This was another disturbing indication of the change which had taken place in her since her cautious arrival in Mexico a month before. The change, perhaps, had in fact happened earlier, when the death of an ailing father had left her suddenly and bewilderingly rich, both in terms of bonds and a release from bondage. But Miss Lucy had only grown aware of it later, here in Mexico — on the day when she had found Mario in Taxco.

It had been an eventful day for Miss Lucy. Perhaps the most eventful of all these new Mexican days. Her sense of freedom, which still faintly shocked her sedate soul, had awakened with her in her sunny hotel bedroom. It had hovered over her patio breakfast with her two companions (whose expenses she was discreetly paying). It had been quenched neither by Vera's complaints of the chill mountain air nor by Ellen's travel-snobbish remark that Taxco was sweet, of course, but nowhere near as picturesque as the hill towns of Tuscany.

To Miss Lucy, with only Philadelphia and Bar Harbor behind her, Taxco's pink weathered roofs and pink, feathery-steepled churches was the impossible realization of a dream. "A rose-red city half as old as time. . . ."

The raffish delight of "foreignness," of being her own mistress, had reached a climax when she saw The Ring.

She saw it in one of the little silversmith shops below the leafy public square. It caught her attention while Vera and Ellen were haggling with the proprietor over a burro pin. It wasn't a valuable ring. To her Quaker eyes, severely trained against the ostentatious, it was almost vulgar. A large, flambuoyant white sapphire on a slender band of silver. But there was something tempting in its brash sparkle. She slipped it on her finger and it flashed the sunlight back at her. It made her mother's prim engagement ring, which was worth certainly fifty times as much, fade out of the picture. Miss Lucy felt unaccountably gay, and then self-conscious. With a hurried glance at the stuffy black backs of Vera and Ellen, she tried to take it off her finger.

It would not come off. And while she was still struggling Vera and Ellen joined her, inspecting it with little cries of admiration.

"My, Lucy, it's darling."

"Pretty as an engagement ring."

Miss Lucy flushed. "Don't be foolish. It's much too young for me. I just tried it on. I don't seem to be able . . ."

She pulled at the ring again. The Mexican who owned the shop hovered at her side, purring compliments.

"Go on, Lucy," said Ellen daringly. "Buy it."

"Really, it's annoying. But since I can't seem to get it off, I suppose I'll have to. . . ."

Miss Lucy bought the white sapphire ring for a sum which was higher than its value, but which was still negligible to her. While Ellen who handled all the financial aspects of the trip because she was "so clever" at those things, settled with the proprietor, Miss Lucy said to Vera:

"I'll get it off with soap and water back at the hotel."

But she didn't take it off. Somehow her new disturbing happiness had become centered in it.

In Taxco Miss Lucy's energy seemed boundless. That evening, before dinner, while Vera and Ellen were resting aching feet in their rooms, she decided upon a second trip to the Church of Santa Prisca which dominated the public square. Her first visit had been marred by the guidebook chatter of her companions. She wanted to be alone in that cool, tenebrous interior, to try to get the feeling of its atmosphere, so different from the homespun godliness of her own Quaker meeting-house at home.

As she stepped through the ornate wooden doors, the fantastic Churrigueresque altar of gold-leaf flowers and cherubs gleamed richly at her. An ancient peasant woman, sheathed in black, was offering a guttering candle to an image of the Virgin. A mongrel dog ran past her into the church, looked around and ran out again. The splendor and the small humanities of the scene had a curious effect upon Miss Lucy. This stood for all that was "popish" and alien and yet it seemed to call her. On an impulse which she less than half understood, she dropped to her knees, in imitation of the peasant woman, and crossed herself, the sapphire ring flashing with some of the exotic quality of the church itself.

Miss Lucy remained kneeling only a short time, but before she rose she was conscious of a presence close to her on the right. She glanced around and saw that a Mexican youth in a spotless white suit had entered the church and was kneeling a few yards away, the thick black hair shining on his reverently bent head. As she got up, his gaze met hers. It was only a momentary glance, but she retained a vivid impression of his face. Honey-brown skin and the eyes — particularly the eyes — dark and patient with a gentle, passive beauty. Somehow that brief contact gave her the sensation of seeing a little into the mind of this strange city of strange people. Remembering him, her spontaneous genuflection seemed somehow the right thing to have done. Not, of course, that she would ever speak of it to Vera and Ellen.

She left the church, happy and ready for dinner. The evening light had faded, and as she passed from the crowded Xocalo into the deserted street which led to the hotel, it was almost night. Her footsteps echoed unfamiliarly against the rough cobblestones. The sound seemed to emphasize her loneliness. A single male figure, staggering slightly, was coming up the hill now toward her. Miss Lucy was no coward, but with a

tingle of alarm she realized that the oncomer was drunk. She looked around. There was no one else in sight. A weak impulse urged her to return to the Xocalo, but she suppressed it. After all, she was an American, she would not be harmed. She marched steadfastly on.

But the seeds of fear were there, and when she came abreast of the man, he peered at her and swung toward her. He was bearded and shabby and his breath reeked of tequila. He started a stream of Spanish which she couldn't understand. She knew he was begging and, trained to organized charities, Miss Lucy had no sympathy for street beggars. She shook her head firmly and tried to move on. But a dirty hand grabbed her sleeve, and the soft whining words continued. She freed her arm more violently than she intended. Anger glinted in the man's eyes. He raised his arm in an indignant gesture.

Although he was obviously not intending to strike her, Miss Lucy recoiled instinctively and as she did so, caught her high heel in the uneven cobbles and fell rather ungracefully on the ground. She lay there, her ankle twisted underneath her while the man stood threateningly, it seemed, over her.

For a moment, Miss Lucy felt panic — blind overwhelming terror completely unjustified by the almost farcical unpleasantness of the situation.

And then from the shadows, another man appeared. A slight man in a white suit. Miss Lucy could not see his face but she knew that it was the boy from the church. She was conscious of his white-sleeved arm flashing toward the beggar and pushing him away.

She saw the beggar reel backwards and shuffle mutteringly off. Then she was aware of a young face close to her own, and a strong arm was helping her to rise. She could not understand all her rescuer said, but his voice was gentle and concerned.

"*Qué malo*," he said, grinning in the direction of the departing beggar. "*Malo Mexicano*." The teeth gleamed white in the moonlight. "Me Mario, from the church, yes? Me help the señora, no?"

He almost carried Miss Lucy, who had twisted her ankle painfully, back to the hotel and right into her room where she was turned over to the flustered administrations of Vera and Ellen.

As Mario hovered solicitously around, Ellen grabbed at her pocket book with a whispered: "How much, Lucy?"

But here Miss Lucy showed a will of her own. "No. Money would be an insult."

And Mario, who seemed to understand, said "*Gracias, Señora*." And after several sentences, in which Miss Lucy understood only the word "*madre*," he picked up Miss Lucy's left hand — the one with the new sapphire ring — kissed it and then bowed himself smilingly out.

That was how Mario had come into

their lives. And having come in, it was apparent that he intended to stay. Next morning he came to the hotel to inquire for Miss Lucy and she saw him squarely for the first time. He was not really handsome. His long lashed eyes were perhaps a shade too close together. His slight mustache above the full-lipped mouth was perhaps too long. But his figure, though slight, was powerful, and there was something about him that inspired both affection and confidence.

He was, he explained, a student anxious to make a little money on vacation. He wanted to be a guide to the Señoras, and since Miss Lucy could not walk with her twisted ankle, he suggested that he hire a car and act as their chauffeur. The fee he requested was astonishingly small and he stubbornly refused to accept more.

The next day he hired a car at a low price which more than satisfied even the parsimonious Miss Ellen and from then on he drove the ladies around to points of interest with as much care and consideration as if they had been his three "*madres.*"

His daily appearances, always in spotless white, were a constant delight to Miss Lucy — indeed, to all three of them. He was full of plans for their entertainment. One day he drove them around the base of Mount Popocatepetl and for several hours they were able to rhapsodize over what is certainly one of the most beautiful and mysterious mountains in the world. And for a moment when they happened to be alone together, staring at the dazzling whiteness of the mountain's magnificent summit, Miss Lucy felt her hand taken in Mario's firm brown one and softly squeezed.

It was, of course, his way of telling her, despite the difficulties of language, that they were sharing a great Mexican experience and he was glad they were sharing it together. Under his touch the large sapphire in the ring pressed into her finger painfully, but another feeling, different from pain, stirred in her.

After the Popocatepetl trip, Miss Lucy decided that it was time to leave Taxco and take up their quarters in Mexico City.

She instructed Ellen to dismiss Mario — to give him an extra hundred pesos and to let him know politely yet firmly that his services were terminated. But Ellen might as well have tried to dispel Popocatepetl or bid it remove itself into the sea. Mario just laughed at her, waved away the hundred pesos, and referred himself directly to Miss Lucy. There were bad Mexicans in Mexico City. He threw out his strong, honey-gold hands. He would take care of them. No, of no importance was the money of Señora Ellen (the other two women were always Señora to him, Miss Lucy alone was Señorita). The important thing was that he should show them everything. Here the strong arms waved to embrace the sun, the sky, the mountains, all of Mexico. And the dark eyes with the

too thick lashes embraced Miss Lucy too.

And Miss Lucy, against some deeply rooted instinct, yielded.

Mario went with them to Mexico City.

It was the second week of their stay in Mexico City and they had decided upon a trip to the Pyramids at Teotihuacan. As usual Miss Lucy sat in front with Mario. He was an excellent driver and she loved to watch his profile as he concentrated on the road; loved his occasional murmurs to himself when something pleased or displeased him. She liked it less when he turned to her, flashing his dark eyes caressingly on her face and lowering them to her breast.

His gaze embarrassed her and today something prompted her to say to him laughingly in English:

"Mario, you are what in America we call a flirt. I imagine you are very popular with the girls here in Mexico."

For a moment he did not seem to understand her remark. Then he burst out:

"Girls — *muchachas. Para me, no.*" His hand went into his breast pocket and he brought out a small battered photograph. "*Mi muchacha.* My girl, *mi unica muchacha . . . Una sola . . .*"

Miss Lucy took the photograph. It was of a woman older than herself with grey hair and large sad eyes. There were lines of worry and illness in her face.

"Your mother?" said Miss Lucy gently. "Tell me about her."

Mario rattled on, not in the slow careful Spanish which he generally reserved for the ladies, but in a rapid monologue of which Miss Lucy understood but part. She gathered that Mario's mother was terribly poor, that she had devoted her life in a tiny Guerreros village to raising fatherless children, and was a saint on earth. It was obvious that Mario felt the almost idolatrous love for his mother that is so frequent in young Mexican males.

While he talked excitedly, Miss Lucy reached a decision. Somehow, before her vacation was over, she'd get from Mario his mother's address and she'd write and send her money, enough money to finance Mario at college. A mother surely would accept it even though her son might be too proud to yield to persuasion.

"Is that one of the pyramids?" It was Ellen's disappointed voice that broke the chain of Miss Lucy's thought. "Why, it's nothing compared to the pyramids in Egypt!"

Miss Lucy was thrilled, however, by the pyramids of the Sun and the Moon. And as she gazed at their somber, ancient magnificence, she felt that strange inner elation, which she had felt on the morning when she had genuflected and crossed herself in the church at Taxco.

"I'm not going to climb up all those crumbly steps," said Ellen peevishly. "I'm too old and it's too hot."

And Vera, though never too hot, was far too old. She stood at the foot of the pyramid, her coat hanging sleevelessly over her shoulders, the inevitable cigarette held in her claw-like hand. "You go, Lucy — you're young and active."

Lucy went.

With Mario's help she climbed to the very top of the Pyramid of the Sun and she was hardly out of breath when she reached the summit, so great was her sense of mystic exaltation.

They sat alone and close together on the summit, this cultivated woman past fifty with a degree from Bryn Mawr, and this almost ignorant boy from an adobe hut in the hinterland of Guerreros. They looked over the vast design of the square where the ancient village had been with its Temple of Quetzalcoatl of the Plumed Serpents, gazing down at the Road of the Dead which led from the Temple to the Pyramid of the Moon.

Mario started to tell her of the sacrificial rites of the feast of Toxcatl which, in ancient days, took place once a year.

As he talked, Miss Lucy half-closed her eyes and visualized the scene: the assembled public hushed in the huge square beneath them; the priests, each in his appointed place on the steps of the Pyramid; the spotless youth who was, of course, Mario.

And because it was Mario who was being sacrificed in her mind, sacrificed to the futility of life and beauty, she felt a warm human pity for him and instinctively her hand went out — the hand with the cheap sapphire ring that would not come off — and it found his, and was held fast in his warm brown fingers.

Miss Lucy was hardly aware of it when Mario's arm slipped round her, and his dark head dropped against her breast. It was not until she became conscious of a smell like warm brown sugar, which was his skin, and a smell of flowery oil which he used on his hair, that all Philadelphia came rushing back. She jumped up hastily — jumping out of the centuries to this practical moment when two friends would be waiting at the base of the pyramid, hungry for lunch — and there were a great many steps to descend.

On the way home Miss Lucy decided that she and Vera would take the back seat, so Ellen sat in front and argued with the sulky Mario.

When they reached the pension, Miss Lucy said quickly:

"It's a Sunday tomorrow, Mario. You'd better take a holiday."

He began to protest. When Lucy repeated "No, not tomorrow, Mario," his face fell like a disappointed child's. Then his expression changed, and his dark eyes looked squarely, challengingly into hers.

As she turned into the house, Miss Lucy felt her heart pounding. The intimacy of that glance had brought into the open the thing which she had not dared to contemplate before. She was quite certain of it now.

Somehow — for some reason that

she did not understand and in some way that her simple mind had never dreamed of — Mario desired her.

He desired her physically.

That night, before she went to bed, Miss Lucy did something she had never done in her life before. She stood in her plain cotton nightgown for several minutes before the long Venetian mirror in the sumptuous room and took stock of herself as a woman.

She saw nothing new or startling — nothing external to balance the startling changes which were going on inside her. Her face was not beautiful. It never had been, even in youth, and now it was uncompromisingly middle-aged. Her hair was almost white but not white enough. It was soft and plentiful and sat rather prettily on her forehead. Her eyes were clear and pleasing in themselves, but surrounded by the lines and shadows natural to her age. Her breasts were firm beneath the cotton nightgown but her figure was in no way remarkable. In fact, there was nothing externally desirable either about her face or her body. And yet she was desired. She knew it. For some reason a handsome Mexican youth found her desirable. Miss Lucy was sure of that.

There was no nonsense about Miss Lucy and she knew that young men often make up to rich older women in the hopes of eventually obtaining money from them. But Mario, apart from the fact that he'd refused all financial offers, did not even know that Miss Lucy was by far the richest of the three ladies. Only a Philadelphia lawyer or a member of their old Quaker family could possibly know how rich Miss Lucy really was. No, if Mario had wanted money, he would have concentrated on Ellen who held the purse strings and never for a moment let it be known to anyone that it was Miss Lucy's money she was dispensing.

There was nothing about Miss Lucy, drab, black-clad Miss Lucy, to suggest wealth. True, her mother's engagement ring had a rather valuable diamond in it. But only an expert jeweler would recognize that. As for the flashy white sapphire ring, that wasn't worth anyone's time or energy and Miss Lucy would have gladly given it to Mario out of gratitude if only she could have got it off her finger.

No, there were thousands of other women in Mexico City with far more obvious signs of wealth. There were young, beautiful women and any one of them might have been pleased and proud to have Mario as an escort and — yes, Miss Lucy faced it uncompromisingly — as something else.

And yet . . . suddenly Miss Lucy became frightened at the illogicality of it all.

Some virginal instinct stirred in her and warned her of — danger.

And because there was no nonsense about Miss Lucy, she decided that she must do something final about it. Lying there quietly beneath the sheets, she came to her great resolution.

Miss Lucy and Vera were waiting at the bus station. Both of them hugged their coats around them as if cold. Vera was always cold, of course. But today Miss Lucy was cold, too, despite the splendid warmth of the spring sunshine. Her eyes — and her nose were red.

They were waiting for Ellen who had been left behind to deliver the final *coup de grace* to Mario. The bus for Patzcuaro was leaving in twenty minutes.

At last Ellen appeared. Her nose was red too.

"You shouldn't have done it, Lucy," she snapped. "It was cruel." She thrust two one-hundred-peso bills into Lucy's hands. "I thought he was going to hit me when I gave him these." She sniffed. "And he burst into tears like a child when he read your letter."

Miss Lucy did not speak. In fact, she spoke very little during the entire length of the tiring bus journey to Patzcuaro.

The three women had been sitting since dinner around their table on the veranda overlooking the serene expanse of Lake Patzcuaro. Ellen, restlessly voluble, was discussing possible plans for the next day. Miss Lucy was, apparently, paying no attention. Her eyes studied the evening grey-green waters of the lake with its clustering islands and its obscene bald-headed vultures that squawked and fought greedily over scraps of carrion on the lake shore.

After a short time she rose, saying: "It's getting a bit cold. I think I'll go up to my room. Goodnight."

Miss Lucy's room, with its small veranda, commanded a view of the lake from another angle. Below her, in the growing darkness, the fishermen were pottering with their boats, talking in low, sibilant voices or singing snatches of Michoacan songs.

Miss Lucy sat watching them. She was thinking of Mario, missing him with an intensity that was almost painful. She had thought of him constantly since she left Mexico City and now was appalled at her harshness in dismissing him by proxy through Ellen. She should have spoken to him herself. She would hate to have him think . . . The thoughts went on with a goading persistence. She had done him a wrong, hurt him. . . .

At some indeterminate stage of her reverie she became conscious of a white-clad figure moving among the fishermen below. Miss Lucy's gaze rested on him and then her heart turned over. She strained forward and peered into the darkness. Surely, surely, there was something familiar about those light, graceful movements — that small, compact form.

But it couldn't be Mario! She had left him hundreds of miles away in Mexico City, and Ellen had been particularly instructed not to tell him where they were going.

The figure in white moved away from the lake shore towards her window. He passed through a shaft of light from an open door. There was no doubt about it now.

It was Mario.

She bent over the balcony, her heart fluttering like a foolish bird. He was only about fifteen feet below her.

"Oh, Miss Lucy, I have found you." He spoke in the slow careful Spanish which he reserved for her. "I knew I would find you."

"But, Mario, how . . . ?"

"The bus company told me you had come here. I got a ride and I have been waiting."

She saw his teeth gleaming as he smiled at her. "Miss Lucy, why did you go away without saying *adios?*"

She did not answer.

"But I am back now to take care of you. And tomorrow you and I — we will go on the lake. Before the other two ladies are up. You and I alone together. There will be a moon and then the sunrise."

"Yes . . ."

"At five o'clock in the morning I come. I will have a boat. Before even the birds awake I will be waiting here."

"Yes, yes . . ."

"Goodnight, *carissima.*"

Miss Lucy went back into her room. Her hands were trembling as she undid her dress and slipped into bed.

And she was still trembling when — in the middle of the night, it seemed — a low whistle beneath her window told her that Mario had come for her.

She dressed swiftly, patted her soft grey hair into place, threw a coat over her shoulders and hurried downstairs. The hotel was very quiet. No one saw her as she made her way through the deserted lobby and no one saw her as she went down the slope to where Mario was waiting for her with the boat.

He took her hand and pressed it to his lips. Then he drew her gently towards the boat.

She did not resist. It was as though he were Destiny leading her onwards towards the inevitable.

Mario had been right. There was a moon — full and lemon-white, it shed a weird light on the opaque waters of the lake.

Miss Lucy was in the bottom of the boat, lying on her coat. It was cold, but she did not seem to notice it. She was watching Mario as he stood up in the boat, guiding it skillfully past the other craft into the deep waters of the lake. He had rolled his trousers up beyond his knees and his legs looked strong and somehow cruel in the moonlight. He was singing.

Miss Lucy had not realized before what a beautiful voice he had. The song seemed sweet and ineffably sad. Mario's eyes caressed her as his gaze travelled downwards from her face and rested on her hands which lay impassive on her lap. The cheap sapphire sparkled in the moonlight.

Miss Lucy was not conscious of time or place as the boat moved slowly toward the secret heart of the lake with its myriad islets. She was not conscious of the dimming stars and the moon paling before the dawn. She felt only a deep, utter tranquillity, as though this gentle almost

imperceptible motion must go on forever. She started at the sound of Mario's voice:

"Listen, the birds."

She heard them in the cluster of small islands that were all around her, but she could see only the vultures that hovered silently overhead.

Mario rested from his rowing and produced a parcel. It contained *tortas*, butter, and goat cheese. He also brought out a bottle of red Mexican wine.

He spread butter on a *torta* with his large clasp knife and handed it to Miss Lucy. Suddenly she realized that she was very hungry. She ate wolfishly and drank from the bottle of the sweet Mexican wine. It went to her head and made her feel girlish and happy. She laughed at everything Mario said and he laughed too while his eyes still caressed her.

And so they breakfasted like honeymoon lovers, as a sunrise splashed red gold over the lake, miles away now from anyone, with only the visible vultures and the invisible songsters to witness them.

When the last *torta* was eaten and the bottle drained, Mario took up his paddle again and propelled the boat deeper into the heart of the lake, on and on without speaking.

As soon as she saw the island, Miss Lucy knew it was the one Mario had chosen. It looked more solitary, more aloof than the rest of them, and there was a fringe of high reeds around its edges.

He steered the boat carefully through the reeds which were so tall that they were completely hidden in a little world of their own. When they reached the shore, he took her hand and raised her gently with the one word:

"Come."

She followed him like a child. He found a dry spot and spread out her coat for her. Then, as she lay down, he sat with her head in his lap. She could see his face above hers very close; could see those dark eyes set a little too close together; could feel the warm breath, wine-scented, that came from his lips.

She closed her eyes knowing that this was the moment to which everything had been leading — ever since the day in the church of Santa Prisca when she had first met Mario. She could feel his hands caressing her hair, her face, gently, gently. She felt him take her hand, felt him touch the sapphire ring.

The moment he touched the ring, she knew. She could feel it in his fingers, an outflowing, obsessive desire. The whole pattern which had seemed so complex was plain.

His hands moved upward. His fingers, still gentle, reached her throat. She didn't scream. She wasn't even frightened.

As his hands tightened their grasp, the full mouth came down upon hers, and their lips met in their first and only kiss.

Mario threw the bloodstained knife away. He hated the sight of blood and

it had disgusted him that he had had to cut off a finger to get the ring.

He hadn't even bothered about the engagement ring that had belonged to Miss Lucy's mother. It was a plain, cheap affair, and for weeks now the great beauty of the sapphire had blinded him to anything else.

He spread the coat carefully over Miss Lucy's body. For a moment he considered putting it in the reeds, but it might float away and be discovered by the fishermen.

Here, on the island, it could be years before anyone came, and by that time — he glanced up at the vultures hovering eternally overhead. . . .

Without looking back Mario went to the boat and rowed towards the deserted mainland shore. There he landed, overturned the boat, and pushed it free so that it would drift into deep water.

An American woman had gone out in a boat on the lake with an inexperienced boatman. They had both been drowned. The officials would never drag so big a lake to find the bodies.

Mario made his way in the direction of the railroad track. He could board a freight car and tomorrow perhaps he would be in Guerreros.

He was sure his mother would like the ring.

ABOUT THE STORY: Broadly speaking, detective-crime stories can be divided into two classifications. The first group consists of those stories which depend almost exclusively on plot: here the emphasis is on originality of "idea" and the ingenuity with which the idea is developed. These tales can, and often do, achieve a full-cut brilliance, both as to technique and style, but most often, it must be confessed, "plot stories" turn out to be mere run-of-the-murder morsels. In the second group, the plot as such (the tricks, the devices, the sheer mechanics) is purely incidental — incidental to the more important virtues of characterization, mood, and background. These deeper values can, and often do, raise an otherwise pedestrian whodunit to the level of genuine artistic excellence.

The truly significant trend of the past decade is the conscious effort on the part of more and more detective-story writers to weld both groups — to merge the technical proficiency of the classic form with the artistic possibilities of so-called "serious" writing. That remarkable progress has been made in this direction — transforming the whodunit into a novel or short story of manners — is apparent to all students of the genre. A single proof of the growing maturity of both the detective story and the detective-story

writer is to be found in the results of EQMM's Second Annual Contest, which produced, as you will learn for yourself in the months to come, memorable tales in all three blood groups.

Q. Patrick's "Love Comes to Miss Lucy," which you have just read, belongs to Group II. Plot, its framework and its flesh and blood, is not the essential ingredient. Rather, it is the flesh and blood of its two main characters — the cultured, middle-aged spinster with a Quakerish upbringing and the almost illiterate Mexican youth from an adobe hut — on which the story hinges. Both characters are vividly realized, with restrained but all the more effective psychological insight. The mood is beautifully balanced, increasing in emotional suspense, as the authors, like literary tight-rope walkers, slowly, sure-footedly, approach the final step. And the background contributes to that mood, with its brooding quality of ancient exoticism.

This is no ordinary crime story, no product of stale formula.

And like all fine stories mirroring life, "Love Comes to Miss Lucy" reveals a lesson of life. Only after you have finished the story do you appreciate fully the poignant irony of the authors' subtle comment, long before the climax, that "as for the flashy white sapphire ring, that wasn't worth anyone's time or energy and Miss Lucy would have gladly given it to Mario." What was of trivial importance to the civilized Philadelphia spinster was of overwhelming importance to the ignorant Mexican boy; what was casual to Miss Lucy represented an obsession to Mario — a craving that could be satisfied only through murder. Ponder the eternal paradox of it. . . .

'Q'

As you all must know by this time — we can hardly be accused of keeping it a secret! — Ellery Queen is without doubt the most fanatical collector of books of detective-crime short stories in the entire history of bibliomania. Approximately 1200 books of detective-crime shorts have been published since 1845. At the time of this writing the Ellery Queen collection is 95% complete — we lack only 60 known titles, and book-scouts, amateur and professional, are helping us in our "research magnificent" to find those 60 missing mysteries. It is a statement of the bare and literal truth that enthusiasts and connoisseurs in nearly every important city on this planet are exploring every nefarious-nook and criminological-cranny in an all-out crusade to make the Ellery Queen library complete to the last 12mo.

There is method in our madness. Only by possessing the largest and finest collection in the world — larger and finer than those of the Library of Congress in Washington and the British Museum in London — can we keep bringing to EQMM readers what Anthony Boucher has so aptly called "rare, undreamt-of" discoveries for both the dabbler and the devotee. Only by tracking down every known detective-crime short story ever published, in books or in periodicals, can we be sure that we have not overlooked a lost treasure, a forgotten flower, of the past. The road is long, the task is herculean, but our bibliofriends never lose faith.

There is method too in our book-collecting. First, we want the book itself — for its contents. In order to have the stories themselves on our shelves, at our fingertips, we will purchase any edition in any condition. Around many a rare book have we danced a homicidal hornpipe, even though the volume was an umpteenth edition, with wrappers gone the way of all pulp. The text's the thing, and the proof is in the reading. But once we have a copy — any *copy — the bibliomania asserts itself, and we try to perfect our collection. At the earliest opportunity we replace the ragged, tattered reprint with a fine copy; then we replace the fine copy with a first edition; then we replace the first edition with the most immaculate first edition available. Only when our books — especially the "cornerstones" — are as brilliant as the day they came off the press are we really satisfied.*

And there is still another refinement. What can be more desirable to a bibliophile (some call it "bibliofool") than a mint first edition? There is one thing: a first edition personally inscribed by the author. That is the final achievement, the ultima thule.

We have such copies — many of them. They are our most prized

volumes — true collector's items. And one of our most prized of all is a book by Dashiell Hammett which he inscribed to your Editor as follows:

For Ellery Queen
with all due thanks for his help
in keeping the stuff from dying on the vine —
Dashiell Hammett

As if Dashiell Hammett's short stories could die on the vine! But we are proud of our editorial part in keeping the vineyard at full harvest, and of passing on to new readers some of the finest crime-wine pressed, aged, and bottled in our time.

Now, sip a glass of sherlockian sherry, vintage 1923 — another "unknown" Hammett short story uncorked from the master's early years of gore and grue . . .

HOUSE DICK

by DASHIELL HAMMETT

THE Montgomery Hotel's regular detective had taken his last week's rake-off from the hotel bootlegger in merchandise instead of cash, had drunk it down, had fallen asleep in the lobby, and had been fired. I happened to be the only idle operative in the Continental Detective Agency's San Francisco branch at the time, and thus it came about that I had three days of hotel-coppering while a man was being found to take the job permanently.

The Montgomery is a quiet hotel of the better sort, and so I had a very restful time of it — until the third and last day.

Then things changed.

I came down into the lobby that afternoon to find Stacey, the assistant manager, hunting for me.

"One of the maids just phoned that there's something wrong up in 906," he said.

We went up to that room together. The door was open. In the center of the floor stood a maid, staring goggle-eyed at the closed door of the clothespress. From under it, extending perhaps a foot across the floor toward us, was a snake-shaped ribbon of blood.

I stepped past the maid and tried the door. It was unlocked. I opened it. Slowly, rigidly, a man pitched out into my arms — pitched out back-

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ward — and there was a six-inch slit down the back of his coat, and the coat was wet and sticky.

That wasn't altogether a surprise: the blood on the floor had prepared me for something of the sort. But when another followed him — facing me, this one, with a dark, distorted face — I dropped the one I had caught and jumped back.

And as I jumped a third man came tumbling out after the others.

From behind me came a scream and a thud as the maid fainted. I wasn't feeling any too steady myself. I'm no sensitive plant, and I've looked at a lot of unlovely sights in my time, but for weeks afterward I could see those three dead men coming out of that clothespress to pile up at my feet: coming out slowly — almost deliberately — in a ghastly game of "follow your leader."

Seeing them, you couldn't doubt that they were really dead. Every detail of their falling, every detail of the heap in which they now lay, had a horrible certainty of lifelessness in it.

I turned to Stacey, who, deathly white himself, was keeping on his feet only by clinging to the foot of the brass bed.

"Get the woman out! Get doctors — police!"

I pulled the three dead bodies apart, laying them out in a grim row, faces up. Then I made a hasty examination of the room.

A soft hat, which fitted one of the dead men, lay in the center of the unruffled bed. The room key was in the door, on the inside. There was no blood in the room except what had leaked out of the clothespress, and the room showed no signs of having been the scene of a struggle.

The door to the bathroom was open. In the bottom of the bath tub was a shattered gin bottle, which, from the strength of the odor and the dampness of the tub, had been nearly full when broken. In one corner of the bathroom I found a small whisky glass, and another under the tub. Both were dry, clean, and odorless.

The inside of the clothespress door was stained with blood from the height of my shoulder to the floor, and two hats lay in the puddle of blood on the closet floor. Each of the hats fitted one of the dead men.

That was all. Three dead men, a broken gin bottle, blood.

Stacey returned presently with a doctor, and while the doctor was examining the dead men, the police detectives arrived.

The doctor's work was soon done.

"This man," he said, pointing to one of them, "was struck on the back of the head with a small blunt instrument, and then strangled. This one," pointing to another, "was simply strangled. And the third was stabbed in the back with a blade perhaps five inches long. They have been dead for about two hours — since noon or a little after."

The assistant manager identified two of the bodies. The man who had been stabbed — the first to fall out of the clothespress — had arrived at

the hotel three days before, registering as Tudor Ingraham of Washington, D. C., and had occupied room 915, three doors away.

The last man to fall out — the one who had been simply choked — was the occupant of this room. His name was Vincent Develyn. He was an insurance broker and had made the hotel his home since his wife's death, some four years before.

The third man had been seen in Develyn's company frequently, and one of the clerks remembered that they had come into the hotel together at about five minutes after twelve this day. Cards and letters in his pockets told us that he was Homer Ansley, a member of the law firm of Lankershim and Ansley, whose offices were in the Miles Building — next door to Develyn's office, in fact.

Develyn's pockets held between $150 and $200; Ansley's wallet contained more than $100; Ingraham's pockets yielded nearly $300, and in a money belt around his waist we found $2200 and two medium-sized unset diamonds. All three had watches — Develyn's was a valuable one — in their pockets, and Ingraham wore two rings, both of which were expensive ones. Ingraham's room key was in his pocket.

Beyond this money — whose presence would seem to indicate that robbery hadn't been the motive behind the three killings — we found nothing on any of their persons to throw the slightest light on the crime. Nor did the most thorough examination of both Ingraham's and Develyn's rooms teach us anything.

In Ingraham's room we found a dozen or more packs of carefully marked cards, some crooked dice, and an immense amount of data on racehorses. Also we found that he had a wife who lived on East Delavan Avenue in Buffalo, and a brother on Crutcher Street in Dallas; as well as a list of names and addresses that we carried off to investigate later. But nothing in either room pointed, even indirectly, at murder.

Phels, the police department Bertillon man, found a number of fingerprints in Develyn's room, but we couldn't tell whether they would be of any value or not until he had worked them up. Though Develyn and Ansley had apparently been strangled by hands, Phels was unable to get prints from either their necks or their collars.

The maid who had discovered the blood said that she had straightened up Develyn's room between ten and eleven that morning, but had not put fresh towels in the bathroom. It was for this purpose that she had gone to the room in the afternoon. She had found the door unlocked, with the key on the inside and, as soon as she entered, had seen the blood and telephoned Stacey.

She had straightened up Ingraham's room, she said, at a few minutes after one. She had gone there earlier — between 10:20 and 10:45 — for that purpose, but Ingraham had not then left it.

The elevator man who had carried Ansley and Develyn up from the lobby at a few minutes after twelve remembered that they had been laughingly discussing their golf scores of the previous day during the ride. No one had seen anything suspicious in the hotel around the time at which the doctor had placed the murders. But that was to be expected.

The murderer could have left the room, closing the door behind him, and walked away secure in the knowledge that at noon a man in the corridors of the Montgomery would attract little attention. If he was staying at the hotel he would simply have gone to his room; if not, he would have either walked all the way down to the street, or down a floor or two and then caught an elevator.

None of the hotel employees had ever seen Ingraham and Develyn together. There was nothing to show that they had even the slightest acquaintance. Ingraham habitually stayed in his room until noon, and did not return to it until late at night. Nothing was known of his affairs.

At the Miles Building we — that is, Marty O'Hara and George Dean of the police department homicide detail, and I — questioned Ansley's partner and Develyn's employees. Both Develyn and Ansley, it seemed, were ordinary men who led ordinary lives: lives that held neither dark spots nor queer kinks. Ansley was married and had two children; he lived on Lake Street. Both men had a sprinkling of relatives and friends scattered here and there through the country; and, so far as we could learn, their affairs were in perfect order.

They had left their offices this day to go to luncheon together, intending to visit Develyn's room first for a drink apiece from a bottle of gin someone coming from Australia had smuggled in to him.

"Well," O'Hara said, when we were on the street again, "this much is clear. If they went up to Develyn's room for a drink, it's a cinch that they were killed almost as soon as they got in the room. Those whisky glasses you found were dry and clean. Whoever turned the trick must have been waiting for them. I wonder about this fellow Ingraham."

"I'm wondering, too," I said. "Figuring it out from the positions I found them in when I opened the closet door, Ingraham sizes up as the key to the whole thing. Develyn was back against the wall, with Ansley in front of him, both facing the door. Ingraham was facing them, with his back to the door. The clothespress was just large enough for them to be packed in it — too small for them to slip down while the door was closed.

"Then there was no blood in the room except what had come from the clothespress. Ingraham, with that gaping slit in his back, couldn't have been stabbed until he was inside the closet, or he'd have bled elsewhere. He was standing close to the other men when he was knifed, and whoever knifed him closed the door quickly afterward.

"Now, why should he have been standing in such a position? Do you dope it out that he and another killed the two friends, and that while he was stowing their bodies in the closet his accomplice finished him off?"

"Maybe," Dean said.

And that "maybe" was still as far as we had gone three days later.

We had sent and received bales of telegrams, having relatives and acquaintances of the dead men interviewed; and we had found nothing that seemed to have any bearing upon their deaths. Nor had we found the slightest connecting link between Ingraham and the other two. We had traced those other two back step by step almost to their cradles. We had accounted for every minute of their time since Ingraham had arrived in San Francisco — thoroughly enough to convince us that neither of them had met Ingraham.

Ingraham, we had learned, was a book-maker and all around crooked gambler. His wife and he had separated, but were on good terms. Some fifteen years before, he had been convicted of "assault with intent to kill" in Newark, N. J., and had served two years in the state prison. But the man he had assaulted had died of pneumonia in Omaha in 1914.

Ingraham had come to San Francisco for the purpose of opening a gambling club, and all our investigations had tended to show that his activities while in the city had been toward that end alone.

The fingerprints Phels had secured had all turned out to belong to Stacey, the maid, the police detectives, or myself. In short, we had found nothing!

So much for our attempts to learn the motive behind the three murders.

We now dropped that angle and settled down to the detail-studying, patience-taxing grind of picking up the murderer's trail. From any crime to its author there is a trail. It may be — as in this case — obscure; but, since matter cannot move without disturbing other matter along its path, there always is — there must be — a trail of some sort. And finding and following such trails is what a detective is paid to do.

In the case of a murder it is possible sometimes to take a short-cut to the end of the trail, by first finding the motive. A knowledge of the motive often reduces the field of possibilities; sometimes points directly to the guilty one.

So far, all we knew about the motive in the particular case we were dealing with was that it hadn't been robbery; unless something we didn't know about had been stolen — something of sufficient value to make the murderer scorn the money in his victims' pockets.

We hadn't altogether neglected the search for the murderer's trail, of course, but — being human — we had devoted most of our attention to trying to find a short-cut. Now we set out to find our man, or men, regardless of what had urged him or them to com-

mit the crimes.

Of the people who had been registered at the hotel on the day of the killing there were nine men of whose innocence we hadn't found a reasonable amount of proof. Four of these were still at the hotel, and only one of that four interested us very strongly. That one — a big rawboned man of forty-five or fifty, who had registered as J. J. Cooper of Anaconda, Montana — wasn't, we had definitely established, really a mining man, as he pretended to be. And our telegraphic communications with Anaconda failed to show that he was known there. Therefore we were having him shadowed — with few results.

Five men of the nine had departed since the murders; three of them leaving forwarding addresses with the mail clerk. Gilbert Jacquemart had occupied room 946 and had ordered his mail forwarded to him at a Los Angeles hotel. W. F. Salway, who had occupied room 1022, had given instructions that his mail be readdressed to a number on Clark Street in Chicago. Ross Orrett, room 609, had asked to have his mail sent to him care of General Delivery at the local post office.

Jacquemart had arrived at the hotel two days before, and had left on the afternoon of the murders. Salway had arrived the day before the murders and had left the day after them. Orrett had arrived the day of the murders and had left the following day.

Sending telegrams to have the first two found and investigated, I went after Orrett myself. A musical comedy named "*What For?*" was being widely advertised just then with gaily printed plum-colored hand-bills. I got one of them and, at a stationery store, an envelope to match, and mailed it to Orrett at the Montgomery Hotel. There are concerns that make a practice of securing the names of arrivals at the principal hotels and mailing them advertisements. I trusted that Orrett, knowing this, wouldn't be suspicious when my gaudy envelope, forwarded from the hotel, reached him through the General Delivery window.

Dick Foley — the Agency's shadow specialist — planted himself in the post office, to loiter around with an eye on the "O" window until he saw my plum-colored envelope passed out, and then to shadow the receiver.

I spent the next day trying to solve the mysterious J. J. Cooper's game, but he was still a puzzle when I knocked off that night.

At a little before five the following morning Dick Foley dropped into my room on his way home to wake me up and tell me what he had done.

"This Orrett baby is our meat!" he said. "Picked him up when he got his mail yesterday afternoon. Got another letter besides yours. Got an apartment on Van Ness Avenue. Took it the day after the killing, under the name of B. T. Quinn. Packing a gun under his left arm — there's that sort of a bulge there. Just went home to bed. Been visiting all the dives in North Beach. Who do you think he's hunting for?"

"Who?"

"Guy Cudner."

That was news! This guy Cudner, alias "The Darkman," was the most dangerous bird on the Coast, if not in the country. He had only been nailed once, but if he had been convicted of all the crimes that everybody knew he had committed he'd have needed half a dozen lives to crowd his sentences into, besides another half-dozen to carry to the gallows. However, he had decidedly the right sort of backing — enough to buy him everything he needed in the way of witnesses, alibis, even juries, and — so the talk went — an occasional judge.

I don't know what went wrong with his support that one time he was convicted up North and sent over for a one-to-fourteen-year hitch; but it adjusted itself promptly, for the ink was hardly dry on the press notices of his conviction before he was loose again on parole.

"Is Cudner in town?"

"Don't know," Dick said, "but this Orrett, or Quinn, or whatever his name is, is surely hunting for him. In Rick's place, at 'Wop' Healey's and at Pigatti's. 'Porky' Grout tipped me off. Says Orrett doesn't know Cudner by sight, but is trying to find him. Porky didn't know what he wants with him."

This Porky Grout was a dirty little rat who would sell out his family — if he ever had one — for the price of a flop. But with these lads who play both sides of the game it's always a question of which side they're playing when you think they're playing yours.

"Think Porky was coming clean?" I asked.

"Chances are — but you can't gamble on him."

"Is Orrett acquainted here?"

"Doesn't seem to be. Knows where he wants to go but has to ask how to get there. Hasn't spoken to anybody that seemed to know him."

"What's he like?"

"Not the kind of egg you'd want to tangle with offhand, if you ask me. He and Cudner would make a good pair. They don't look alike. This egg is tall and slim, but he's built right — those fast, smooth muscles. Face is sharp without being thin, if you get me. I mean all the lines in it are straight. No curves. Chin, nose, mouth, eyes — all straight, sharp lines and angles. Looks like the kind of egg we know Cudner is. Make a good pair. Dresses well and doesn't look like a rowdy — but harder than hell! A big game hunter! Our meat, I bet you!"

"It doesn't look bad," I agreed. "He came to the hotel the morning of the day the men were killed, and checked out the next morning. He packs a rod, and changed his name after he left. And now he's paired off with The Darkman. It doesn't look bad at all!"

"I'm telling you," Dick said, "this fellow looks like three killings wouldn't disturb his rest any. I wonder where Cudner fits in."

"I can't guess. But, if he and Orrett haven't connected yet, then Cudner wasn't in on the murders; but he may

give us the answer."

Then I jumped out of bed.

"I'm going to gamble on Porky's dope being on the level! How would you describe Cudner?"

"You know him better than I do."

"Yes, but how would you describe him to me if I didn't know him?"

"A little fat guy with a red forked scar on his left cheek. What's the idea?"

"It's a good one," I admitted. "That scar makes all the difference in the world. If he didn't have it and you were to describe him you'd go into all the details of his appearance. But he has it, so you simply say, 'A little fat guy with a red forked scar on his left cheek.' It's a ten to one that that's just how he has been described to Orrett. I don't look like Cudner, but I'm his size and build, and with a scar on my face Orrett will fall for me."

"What then?"

"There's no telling; but I ought to be able to learn a lot if I can get Orrett talking to me as Cudner. It's worth a try anyway."

"You can't get away with it — not in San Francisco. Cudner is too well known."

"What difference does that make, Dick? Orrett is the only one I want to fool. If he takes me for Cudner, well and good. If he doesn't, still well and good. I won't force myself on him."

"How are you going to fake the scar?"

"Easy! We have pictures of Cudner, showing the scar, in the criminal gallery. I'll get some collodion — it's sold in drug stores under several trade names for putting on cuts and scatches — color it, and imitate Cudner's scar on my cheek. It dries with a shiny surface and, put on thick, will stand out enough to look like an old scar."

It was a little after eleven the following night when Dick telephoned me that Orrett was in Pigatti's place, on Pacific Street, and apparently settled there for some little while. My scar already painted on, I jumped into a taxi and within a few minutes was talking to Dick, around the corner from Pigatti's.

"He's sitting at the last table back on the left side. And he was alone when I came out. You can't miss him. He's the only egg in the joint with a clean collar."

"You better stick outside — half a block or so away — with the taxi," I told Dick. "Maybe brother Orrett and I will leave together and I'd just as leave have you standing by in case things break wrong."

Pigatti's place is a long, narrow, low-ceilinged cellar, always dim with smoke. Down the middle runs a narrow strip of bare floor for dancing. The rest of the floor is covered with closely packed tables, whose cloths are always soiled.

Most of the tables were occupied when I came in, and half a dozen couples were dancing. Few of the faces to be seen were strangers to the morning "line up" at police headquarters.

Peering through the smoke, I saw Orrett at once, seated alone in a far

corner, looking at the dancers with the set blank face of one who masks an all-seeing watchfulness. I walked down the other side of the room and crossed the strip of dance-floor directly under a light, so that the scar might be clearly visible to him. Then I selected a vacant table not far from his, and sat down facing him.

Ten minutes passed while he pretended an interest in the dancers and I affected a thoughtful stare at the dirty cloth on my table; but neither of us missed so much as a flicker of the other's lids.

His eyes — grey eyes that were pale without being shallow, with black needle-point pupils — met mine after a while in a cold, steady, inscrutable stare; and, very slowly, he got to his feet. One hand — his right — in a side pocket of his dark coat, he walked straight across to my table and sat down opposite me.

"Cudner?"

"Looking for me, I hear," I replied, trying to match the icy smoothness of his voice, as I was matching the steadiness of his gaze.

He had sat down with his left side turned slightly toward me, which put his right arm in not too cramped a position for straight shooting from the pocket that still held his hand.

"You were looking for me, too."

I didn't know what the correct answer to that would be, so I just grinned. But the grin didn't come from my heart. I had, I realized, made a mistake — one that might cost me something before we were done. This bird wasn't hunting for Cudner as a friend, as I had carelessly assumed, but was on the war path.

I saw those three dead men falling out of the closet in room 906!

My gun was inside the waist-band of my trousers, where I could get it quickly, but his was in his hand. So I was careful to keep my own hands motionless on the edge of the table, while I widened my grin.

His eyes were changing now, and the more I looked at them the less I liked them. The grey in them had darkened and grown duller, and the pupils were larger, and white crescents were showing beneath the gray. Twice before I had looked into eyes such as these — and I hadn't forgotten what they meant — the eyes of the congenital killer!

"Suppose you speak your piece," I suggested after a while.

But he wasn't to be beguiled into conversation. He shook his head a mere fraction of an inch and the corners of his compressed mouth dropped down a trifle. The white crescents of eyeballs were growing broader, pushing the grey circles up under the upper lids.

It was coming! And there was no use waiting for it!

I drove a foot at his shins under the table, and at the same time pushed the table into his lap and threw myself across it. The bullet from his gun went off to one side. Another bullet — not from his gun — thudded into the table that was upended between us.

I had him by the shoulders when the second shot from behind took him in the left arm, just below my hand. I let go then and fell away, rolling over against the wall and twisting around to face the direction from which the bullets were coming.

I twisted around just in time to see — jerking out of sight behind a corner of the passage that gave to a small dining room — Guy Cudner's scarred face. And as it disappeared a bullet from Orrett's gun splattered the plaster from the wall where it had been.

I grinned at the thought of what must be going on in Orrett's head as he lay sprawled out on the floor confronted by two Cudners. But he took a shot at me just then and I stopped grinning. Luckily, he had to twist around to fire at me, putting his weight on his wounded arm, and the pain made him wince, spoiling his aim.

Before he had adjusted himself more comfortably I had scrambled on hands and knees to Pigatti's kitchen door — only a few feet away — and had myself safely tucked out of range around an angle in the wall; all but my eyes and the top of my head, which I risked so that I might see what went on.

Orrett was now ten or twelve feet from me, lying flat on the floor, facing Cudner, with a gun in his hand and another on the floor beside him.

Across the room, perhaps thirty feet away, Cudner was showing himself around his protecting corner at brief intervals to exchange shots with the man on the floor, occasionally sending one my way. We had the place to ourselves. There were four exits, and the rest of Pigatti's customers had used them all.

I had my gun out, but I was playing a waiting game. Cudner, I figured, had been tipped off to Orrett's search for him and had arrived on the scene with no mistaken idea of the other's attitude. Just what there was between them and what bearing it had on the Montgomery murders was a mystery to me, but I didn't try to solve it now. I kept away from the bullets that were flying around as best I could and waited.

They were firing in unison. Cudner would show around his corner, both men's weapons would spit, and he would duck out of sight again. Orrett was bleeding about the head now and one of his legs sprawled crookedly behind him. I couldn't determine whether Cudner had been hit or not.

Each had fired eight, or perhaps nine, shots when Cudner suddenly jumped out into full view, pumping the gun in his left hand as fast as its mechanism would go, the gun in his right hand hanging at his side. Orrett had changed guns, and was on his knees now, his fresh weapon keeping pace with his enemy's.

That couldn't last!

Cudner dropped his left-hand gun, and, as he raised the other, he sagged forward and went down on one knee. Orrett stopped firing abruptly and fell over on his back — spread out full-length. Cudner fired once more —

wildly, into the ceiling — and pitched down on his face.

I sprang to Orrett's side and kicked both of his guns away. He was lying still but his eyes were open.

"Are you Cudner, or was he?"

"He."

"Good!" he said, and closed his eyes.

I crossed to where Cudner lay and turned him over on his back. His chest was literally shot to pieces.

His thick lips worked, and I put my ear down to them.

"I get him?"

"Yes," I lied, "he's already cold."

His dying face twisted into a grin.

"Sorry . . . three in hotel . . ." he gasped hoarsely. "Mistake . . . wrong room . . . got one . . . had to . . . other two . . . protect myself . . . I . . ."

He shuddered and died.

A week later the hospital people let me talk to Orrett. I told him what Cudner had said before he died.

"That's the way I doped it out," Orrett said from out of the depths of the bandages in which he was swathed. "That's why I moved and changed my name the next day."

"I suppose you've got it nearly figured out by now," he said after a while.

"No," I confessed, "I haven't. I've an idea what it was all about but I could stand having a few details cleared up."

"I'm sorry I can't clear them up for you, but I've got to cover myself up. I'll tell you a story, though, and it may help you. Once upon a time there was a high-class crook — what the newspapers call a Master Mind. Came a day when he found he had accumulated enough money to give up the game and settle down as an honest man.

"But he had two lieutenants — one in New York and one in San Francisco — and they were the only men in the world who knew he was a crook. And, besides that, he was afraid of both of them. So he thought he'd rest easier if they were out of the way. And it happened that neither of these lieutenants had ever seen the other.

"So this Master Mind convinced each of them that the other was doublecrossing him and would have to be bumped off for the safety of all concerned. And both of them fell for it. The New Yorker went to San Francisco to get the other, and the San Franciscan was told that the New Yorker would arrive on such-and-such a day and would stay at such-and-such a hotel.

"The Master Mind figured that there was an even chance of both men passing out when they met — and he was nearly right at that. But he was sure that one would die, and then, even if the other missed hanging, there would only be one man left for him to dispose of later."

There weren't as many details in the story as I would have liked to have, but it explained a lot.

"How do you figure out Cudner's getting the wrong room?" I asked.

"That was funny! Maybe it happened like this: My room was 609 and the killing was done in 906. Suppose Cudner went to the hotel on the day he knew I was due and took a quick slant at the register. He wouldn't want to be seen looking at it if he could avoid it, so he didn't turn it around, but flashed a look at it as it lay — facing the desk.

"When you read numbers of three figures upside-down you have to transpose them in your head to get them straight. Like 123. You'd get that 3-2-1, and then turn them around in your head. That's what Cudner did with mine. He was keyed up, of course, thinking of the job ahead of him, and he overlooked the fact that 609 upside-down still reads 609 just the same. So he turned it around and made it 906 — Develyn's room."

"That's how I doped it," I said, "and I reckon it's about right. And then he looked at the key-rack and saw that 906 wasn't there. So he thought he might just as well get his job done right then, when he could roam the hotel corridors without attracting attention. Of course, he may have gone up to the room before Ansley and Develyn came in and waited for them, but I doubt it.

"I think it more likely that he simply happened to arrive at the hotel a few minutes after they had come in. Ansley was probably alone in the room when Cudner opened the unlocked door and came in — Develyn being in the bathroom getting the glasses.

"Ansley was about your size and age, and close enough in appearance to fit a rough description of you. Cudner went for him, and then Develyn, hearing the scuffle, dropped the bottle and glasses, rushed out, and got his.

"Cudner, being the sort he was, would figure that two murders were no worse than one, and he wouldn't want to leave any witnesses around.

"And that is probably how Ingraham got into it. He was passing on his way from his room to the elevator and perhaps heard the racket and investigated. And Cudner put a gun in his face and made him stow the two bodies in the clothespress. And then he stuck his knife in Ingraham's back and slammed the door on him. That's about the —"

An indignant nurse descended on me from behind and ordered me out of the room, accusing me of getting her patient excited.

Orrett stopped me as I turned to go.

"Keep your eye on the New York dispatches," he said, "and maybe you'll get the rest of the story. It's not over yet. Nobody has anything on me out here. That shooting in Pigatti's was self-defense so far as I'm concerned. And as soon as I'm on my feet again and can get back East there's going to be a Master Mind holding a lot of lead. That's a promise!"

I believed him.

It is a constant source of wonder to your Editor to come upon more and more evidence of Agatha Christie's remarkable versatility as a writer. Looking over the history of her published work, we find that she has written nearly every imaginable type of story in the mystery field. Indeed, it would not be stretching critical judgment to nominate Agatha Christie as "The Compleat Criminologist" of our time. She has given us pure detective stories, psychological thrillers, tales of suspense and horror, burlesques, satires, parodies, stories of the supernatural, tales of mystery and crime, spy and secret service stories, adventure stories, tales of mysticism, and crook stories; she has published a book of poetry, serious novels, and recently a charming volume of archeological memoirs. Have we omitted anything? Yes, the hardboiled story. To date there is no record of any "tough" story signed by Agatha Christie; but we are willing to bet — and give odds, too — that if Miss Christie chose to write a hardboiled whodunit, it would rank with the best. Apparently she can write anything she sets her mind to; she has the enthusiasm, the flexibility, the "know-how" — and it shows in all her work.

Oh, yes — we omitted another type. The humorous story. "Crime with a laugh," as James Nelson has expressed it, or "murder without tears," as Will Cuppy so aptly put it. Agatha Christie has written many a fine "comedy of terrors," to borrow still another phrase, this time from Michael Innes. We have just discovered one never previously published in the United States — "The Mystery of the Spanish Shawl," originally titled in England "Mr. Eastwood's Adventure." We pass it on to you — but don't pass over Agatha Christie's sly and satirical digs at the species of detective story concocted by certain well-known writers — guess who?

THE MYSTERY OF THE SPANISH SHAWL

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

MR. EASTWOOD looked at the ceiling. Then he looked down at the floor. From the floor his gaze travelled slowly up the right-hand wall. Then, with a sudden stern effort, he focused his gaze once more upon the typewriter before him.

The virgin white of the sheet of paper was defaced by a title written in capital letters.

"THE MYSTERY OF THE SECOND CUCUMBER," so it ran. A pleasing title. Anthony Eastwood felt that any one reading that title would be at

once intrigued and arrested by it. "The Mystery of the Second Cucumber," they would say. "What *can* that be about? A *cucumber?* The second *cucumber?* I must certainly read that story." And they would be thrilled and charmed by the consummate ease with which this master of detective fiction had woven an exciting plot round this simple vegetable.

That was all very well. Anthony Eastwood knew as well as any one what the story ought to be like — the bother was that somehow or other he couldn't get on with it. The two essentials for a story were a title and a plot — the rest was mere spade-work; sometimes the title led to a plot all by itself, as it were, and then all was plain sailing — but in this case the title continued to adorn the top of the page, and not the vestige of a plot was forthcoming.

Again Anthony Eastwood's gaze sought inspiration from the ceiling, the floor, and the wallpaper, and still nothing materialized.

"I shall call the heroine Sonia," said Anthony, to urge himself on. "Sonia or possibly Dolores — she shall have a skin of ivory pallor — the kind that's not due to ill-health, and eyes like fathomless pools. The hero shall be called George, or possibly John — something short and British. Then the gardener — I suppose there will have to be a gardener, we've got to drag that beastly cucumber in somehow or other — the gardener might be Scottish, and amusingly pessimistic about the early frosts."

This method sometimes worked, but it didn't seem to be going to this morning. Although Anthony could see Sonia and George and the comic gardener quite clearly, they didn't show any willingness to be active and do things.

"I could make it a banana, of course," thought Anthony desperately. "Or a lettuce, or a Brussel sprout — Brussel sprout, now, how about that? Really a cryptogram for *Brussels* — stolen bearer bonds — sinister Belgian Baron."

For a moment a gleam of light seemed to show, but it died down again. The Belgian Baron wouldn't materialize, and Anthony suddenly remembered that early frosts and cucumbers were incompatible, which seemed to put the lid on the amusing remarks of the Scottish gardener.

"Oh! Damn!" said Mr. Eastwood.

He rose and seized the *Daily Mail.* It was just possible that some one or other had been done to death in such a way as to lend inspiration to a perspiring author. But the news this morning was mainly political and foreign. Mr. Eastwood cast down the paper in disgust.

Next seizing a novel from the table, he closed his eyes and dabbed his finger down on one of the pages. The word thus indicated by Fate was "sheep." Immediately, with startling brilliance, a whole story unrolled itself in Mr. Eastwood's brain. Lovely girl — lover killed in the war, her brain unhinged — tends sheep on the Scot-

tish mountains — mystic meeting with dead lover, final effect of sheep and moonlight like Academy picture with girl lying dead in the snow, and *two trails of footsteps.* . . .

It was a beautiful story. Anthony came out of its conception with a sigh and a sad shake of the head. He knew only too well that the editor in question did not want that kind of story — beautiful though it might be. The kind of story he wanted, and insisted on having (and incidentally paid handsomely for getting), was all about mysterious dark women, stabbed to the heart, a young hero unjustly suspected, and the sudden unravelling of the mystery and fixing of the guilt on the least likely person, by means of wholly inadequate clues — in fact, "THE MYSTERY OF THE SECOND CUCUMBER."

"Although," reflected Anthony, "ten to one he'll alter the title and call it something rotten, like '*Murder Most Foul*' without so much as asking me! Oh, curse that telephone."

He strode angrily to it, and took down the receiver. Twice already in the last hour he had been summoned to it — once for a wrong number, and once to be roped in for dinner by a skittish society dame whom he hated bitterly, but who had been too pertinacious to defeat.

"Hallo!" he growled into the receiver.

A woman's voice answered him, a soft caressing voice with a trace of foreign accent.

"Is that you, beloved?" it said.

"Well — er — I don't know," said Mr. Eastwood cautiously. "Who's speaking?"

"It is I. Carmen. Listen, beloved. I am pursued — in danger — you must come at once. It is life or death now."

"I beg your pardon," said Mr. Eastwood politely. "I'm afraid you've got the wrong ——"

She broke in before he could complete the sentence.

"*Madre de Dios!* They are coming. If they find out what I am doing, they will kill me. Do not fail me. Come at once. It is death for me if you don't come. You know, 320 Kirk Street. The word is cucumber. . . . Hush. . . ."

He heard the faint click as she hung up the receiver at the other end. "Well, I'm damned," said Mr. Eastwood, very much astonished. He crossed over to his tobacco jar, and filled his pipe carefully.

"I suppose," he mused, "that that was some curious effect of my subconscious self. She can't have *said* cucumber. The whole thing is very extraordinary. Did she say cucumber, or didn't she?"

He strolled up and down irresolutely.

"320 Kirk Street. I wonder what it's all about? She'll be expecting the other man to turn up. I wish I could have explained. 320 Kirk Street. The word is cucumber — oh, impossible, absurd — hallucination of a busy brain."

He glanced malevolently at the typewriter.

"What good are you, I should like to know? I've been looking at you all the morning, and a lot of good it's done me. An author should get his plots from life — from life, do you hear? I'm going out to get one now."

He clapped a hat on his head, gazed affectionately at his priceless collection of old enamels, and left the flat.

Kirk Street, as most Londoners know, is a long, straggling thoroughfare, chiefly devoted to antique shops, where all kinds of spurious goods are offered at fancy prices. There are also old brass shops, glass shops, decayed second-hand shops, and second-hand clothes dealers.

No. 320 was devoted to the sale of old glass. Glassware of all kinds filled it to overflowing. It was necessary for Anthony to move gingerly as he advanced up a centre aisle flanked by wine glasses and with lustres and chandeliers swaying and twinkling over his head.

A very old lady was sitting at the back of the shop. She had a budding mustache that many an undergraduate might have envied, and a truculent manner.

She looked at Anthony and said, "Well?" in a forbidding voice.

Anthony was a young man somewhat easily discomposed. He immediately inquired the price of some hock glasses.

"Forty-five shillings for half a dozen."

"Oh, really," said Anthony. "Rather nice, aren't they? How much are these things?"

"Beautiful, they are, old Waterford. Let you have the pair for eighteen guineas."

Mr. Eastwood felt that he was laying up trouble for himself. In another minute he would be buying something, hypnotized by this fierce old woman's eye. And yet he could not bring himself to leave the shop.

"What about that?" he asked, and pointed to a chandelier.

"Thirty-five guineas."

"Ah!" said Mr. Eastwood regretfully. "That's rather more than I can afford."

"What do you want?" asked the old lady. "Something for a wedding present?"

"That's it," said Anthony, snatching at the explanation. "But they're very difficult to suit."

"Ah, well," said the lady, rising with an air of determination. "A nice piece of old glass comes amiss to nobody. I've got a couple of old decanters here — and there's a nice little liqueur set, just the thing for a bride ——"

For the next ten minutes Anthony endured agonies. The lady had him firmly in hand. Every conceivable specimen of the glass-maker's art was paraded before his eyes. He became desperate.

"Beautiful, beautiful," he exclaimed in a perfunctory manner, as he put down a large goblet that was being forced on his attention. Then blurted out hurriedly, "I say, are you on the telephone here?"

"No, we're not. There's a call office

at the post office just opposite. Now, what do you say, the goblet — or these fine old rummers?"

Not being a woman, Anthony was quite unversed in the gentle art of getting out of a shop without buying anything.

"I'd better have the liqueur set," he said gloomily.

It seemed the smallest thing. He was terrified of being landed with the chandelier.

With bitterness in his heart he paid for his purchase. And then, as the old lady was wrapping up the parcel, courage suddenly returned to him. After all, she would only think him eccentric, and, anyway, what the devil did it matter what she thought?

"Cucumber," he said, clearly and firmly.

The old crone paused abruptly in her wrapping operations.

"Eh? What did you say?"

"Nothing," lied Anthony hastily.

"Oh! I thought you said cucumber."

"So I did," said Anthony defiantly.

"Well," said the old lady. "Why ever didn't you say that before? Wasting my time. Through that door there and upstairs. She's waiting for you."

As though in a dream, Anthony passed through the door indicated, and climbed some extremely dirty stairs. At the top of them a door stood ajar displaying a tiny sitting-room.

Sitting on a chair, her eyes fixed on the door, and an expression of eager expectancy on her face, was a girl.

Such a girl! She really had the ivory pallor that Anthony had so often written about. And her eyes! Such eyes! She was not English, that could be seen at a glance. She had a foreign exotic quality which showed itself even in the costly simplicity of her dress.

Anthony paused in the doorway, somewhat abashed. The moment of explanations seemed to have arrived. But with a cry of delight the girl rose and flew into his arms.

"You have come," she cried. "You have come. Oh, the saints and the Holy Madonna be praised."

Anthony, never one to miss opportunities, echoed her fervently. She drew away at last, and looked up in his face with a charming shyness.

"I should never have known you," she declared. "Indeed I should not."

"Wouldn't you?" said Anthony feebly.

"No, even your eyes seem different — and you are ten times handsomer than I ever thought you would be."

"Am I?"

To himself Anthony was saying, "Keep calm, my boy, keep calm. The situation is developing very nicely, but don't lose your head."

"I may kiss you again, yes?"

"Of course you can," said Anthony heartily. "As often as you like."

There was a very pleasant interlude.

"I wonder who the devil I am?" thought Anthony. "I hope to goodness the real fellow won't turn up. What a perfect darling she is."

Suddenly the girl drew away from

him, and terror showed in her face.

"You were not followed here?"

"Lord, no."

"Ah, but they are very cunning. You do not know them as well as I do, Boris, he is a fiend."

"I'll soon settle Boris for you."

"You are a lion — yes, but a lion. As for them, they are *canaille* — all of them. Listen, *I have it!* They would have killed me had they known, I was afraid — I did not know what to do, and then I thought of you. . . . Hush, what was that?"

It was a sound in the shop below. Motioning to him to remain where he was, she tiptoed out on to the stairs. She returned with a white face and staring eyes.

"*Madre de Dios!* It is the police. They are coming up here. You have a knife? A revolver? Which?"

"My dear girl, you don't seriously expect me to murder a policeman?"

"Oh, but you are mad — mad! They will take you away and hang you by the neck until you're dead."

"They'll *what?*" said Mr. Eastwood, with a very unpleasant feeling going up and down his spine.

Steps sounded on the stair.

"Here they come," whispered the girl. "Deny everything. It is the only hope."

"That's easy enough," muttered Mr. Eastwood, *sotto voce.*

In another minute two men had entered the room. They were in plain clothes, but they had an official bearing that spoke of long training. The smaller of the two, a little dark man with quiet grey eyes, was the spokesman.

"I arrest you, Conrad Fleckman," he said, "for the murder of Anna Rosenberg. Anything you say will be used in evidence against you. Here is my warrant and you will do well to come quietly."

A half-strangled scream burst from the girl's lips. Anthony stepped forward with a composed smile.

"You are making a mistake, officer," he said pleasantly. "My name is Anthony Eastwood."

The two detectives seemed completely unimpressed by his statement.

"We'll see about that later," said one of them, the one who had not spoken before. "In the meantime, you come along with us."

"Conrad," wailed the girl. "Conrad, do not let them take you."

Anthony looked at the detectives.

"You will permit me, I am sure, to say good-bye to this young lady?"

With more decency of feeling than he had expected, the two men moved towards the door. Anthony drew the girl into the corner by the window, and spoke to her in a rapid undertone.

"Listen to me. What I said was true. I am not Conrad Fleckman. When you rang up this morning, they must have given you the wrong number. My name is Anthony Eastwood. I came in answer to your appeal because — well, I came."

She stared at him incredulously.

"You are not Conrad Fleckman?"

"No."

"Oh!" she cried, with a deep accent

of distress. "And I kissed you!"

"That's all right," Mr. Eastwood assured her. "The early Christians made a practice of that sort of thing. Jolly sensible. Now look here, I'll tool off these people. I shall soon prove my identity. In the meantime, they won't worry you, and you can warn this precious Conrad of yours. Afterwards ——"

"Yes?"

"Well — just this. My telephone number is Northwestern 1743 — and mind they don't give you the wrong one."

She gave him an enchanting glance, half-tears, half a smile.

"I shall not forget — indeed, I shall not forget."

"That's all right then. Good-bye. I say ——"

"Yes?"

"Talking of the early Christians — once more wouldn't matter, would it?"

She flung her arms round his neck. Her lips just touched his.

"I do like you — yes, I do like you. You will remember that, whatever happens, won't you?"

Anthony disengaged himself reluctantly and approached his captors.

"I am ready to come with you. You don't want to detain this young lady, I suppose?"

"No, sir, that will be quite all right," said the small man civilly.

"Decent fellows, these Scotland Yard men," thought Anthony to himself, as he followed them down the narrow stairway.

There was no sign of the old woman in the shop, but Anthony caught a heavy breathing from a door at the rear, and guessed that she stood behind it, cautiously observing events.

Once out in the dinginess of Kirk Street, Anthony drew a long breath, and addressed the smaller of the two men.

"Now then, inspector — you are an inspector, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir. Detective-Inspector Verrall. This is Detective-Sergeant Carter."

"Well, Inspector Verrall, the time has come to talk sense — and to listen to it too. I'm not Conrad What's-his-name. My name is Anthony Eastwood, as I told you, and I am a writer by profession. If you will accompany me to my flat, I think that I shall be able to satisfy you of my identity."

Something in the matter-of-fact way Anthony spoke seemed to impress the detectives. For the first time an expression of doubt passed over Verrall's face.

Carter, apparently, was harder to convince.

"I dare say," he sneered. "But you'll remember the young lady was calling you 'Conrad' all right."

"Ah! that's another matter. I don't mind admitting to you both that for — er — reasons of my own, I was passing myself off upon that lady as a person called Conrad. A private matter, you understand."

"Likely story, isn't it?" observed Carter. "No, sir, you come along with us. Hail that taxi, Joe."

A passing taxi was stopped, and the three men got inside. Anthony made a last attempt, addressing himself to Verrall as the more easily convinced of the two.

"Look here, my dear inspector, what harm is it going to do you to come along to my flat and see if I'm speaking the truth? You can keep the taxi if you like — there's a generous offer! It won't make five minutes difference either way."

Verrall looked at him searchingly.

"I'll do it," he said suddenly. "Strange as it appears, I believe you're speaking the truth. We don't want to make fools of ourselves at the station by arresting the wrong man. What's the address?"

"Forty-eight Brandenburg Mansions."

Verrall leaned out and shouted the address to the taxi-driver. All three sat in silence until they arrived at their destination, when Carter sprang out, and Verrall motioned to Anthony to follow him."

"No need for any unpleasantness," he explained, as he too descended. "We'll go in friendly like, as though Mr. Eastwood was bringing a couple of pals home."

Anthony felt extremely grateful for the suggestion and his opinion of the Criminal Investigation Department rose every minute.

In the hallway they were fortunate enough to meet Rogers, the porter. Anthony stopped.

"Ah! Good-evening, Rogers," he remarked casually.

"Good-evening, Mr. Eastwood," replied the porter respectfully.

He was attached to Anthony, who set an example of liberality not always followed by his neighbors.

Anthony paused with his foot on the bottom step of the stairs.

"By the way, Rogers," he said casually. "How long have I been living here? I was just having a little discussion about it with these friends of mine."

"Let me see, sir, it must be getting on for close on four years now."

"Just what I thought."

Anthony flung a glance of triumph at the two detectives. Carter grunted, but Verrall was smiling broadly.

"Good, but not good enough, sir," he remarked. "Shall we go up?"

Anthony opened the door of the flat with his latch-key. He was thankful to remember that Seamark, his man, was out. The fewer witnesses of this catastrophe the better.

The typewriter was as he had left it. Carter strode across to the table and read the headline on the paper.

"THE MYSTERY OF THE SECOND CUCUMBER?" he announced in a gloomy voice.

"A story of mine," exclaimed Anthony nonchalantly.

"That's another good point, sir," said Verrall nodding his head, his eyes twinkling. "By the way, sir, what was it about? What *was* the mystery of the second cucumber?"

"Ah, there you have me," said Anthony. "It's that second cucumber that's at the bottom of this trouble."

Carter was looking at him intently. Suddenly he shook his head and tapped his forehead significantly.

"Balmy, poor young fellow," he murmured in an audible aside.

"Now, gentlemen," said Mr. Eastwood briskly. "To business. Here are letters addressed to me, my bankbook, communications from editors. What more do you want?"

Verrall examined the papers that Anthony thrust upon him.

"Speaking for myself, sir," he said respectfully, "I want nothing more. I'm quite convinced. But I can't take the responsibility of releasing you upon myself. You see, although it seems positive that you have been residing here as Mr. Eastwood for some years, yet it is possible that Conrad Fleckman and Anthony Eastwood are one and the same person. I must make a thorough search of the flat, take your fingerprints, and telephone to headquarters."

"That seems a comprehensive program," remarked Anthony. "I can assure you that you're welcome to any guilty secrets of mine you may lay your hands on."

The inspector grinned. For a detective he was a singularly human person.

"Will you go into the little end room, sir, with Carter, while I'm getting busy?"

"All right," said Anthony unwillingly. "I suppose it couldn't be the other way about, could it?"

"Meaning?"

"That you and I and a couple of whiskies and sodas should occupy the end room while our friend, the Sergeant, does the heavy searching."

"If you prefer it, sir?"

"I do prefer it."

They left Carter investigating the contents of the desk with businesslike dexterity. As they passed out of the room, they heard him take down the telephone and call up Scotland Yard.

"This isn't so bad," said Anthony, settling himself with a whisky and soda by his side, having hospitably attended to the wants of Inspector Verrall. "Shall I drink first, just to show you that the whisky isn't poisoned?"

The inspector smiled.

"Very irregular, all this," he remarked. "But we know a thing or two in our profession. I realized right from the start that we'd made a mistake. But of course one had to observe all the usual forms. You can't get away from red tape, can you, sir?"

"I suppose not," said Anthony regretfully. "The Sergeant doesn't seem very matey yet, though, does he?"

"Ah, he's a fine man, Detective-Sergeant Carter. You wouldn't find it easy to put anything over on him."

"I've noticed that," said Anthony. "By the way, inspector," he added. "Is there any objection to my hearing something about myself?"

"In what way, sir?"

"Come now, don't you realize that I'm devoured by curiosity? Who was Anna Rosenberg, and why did I murder her?"

"You'll read all about it in the newspapers tomorrow, sir."

"Tomorrow I may be Myself with Yesterday's ten thousand years," quoted Anthony. "I really think you might satisfy my perfectly legitimate curiosity, inspector. Cast aside your official reticence, and tell me all."

"It's quite irregular, sir."

"My dear inspector, when we are becoming such fast friends?"

"Well, sir, Anna Rosenberg was a German who lived at Hampstead. With no visible means of livelihood, she grew yearly richer and richer."

"I'm just the opposite," commented Anthony. "I have a visible means of livelihood and I get yearly poorer and poorer. Perhaps I should do better if I lived in Hampstead. I've always heard Hampstead is very bracing."

"At one time," continued Verrall, "she was a second-hand clothes dealer ——"

"That explains it," interrupted Anthony. "I remember selling my uniform after the war — not khaki, the other stuff. The whole flat was full of red trousers and gold lace, spread out to best advantage. A fat man in a check suit arrived in a Rolls Royce with a factotum complete with bag. He bid one pound ten for the lot. In the end I threw in a hunting coat and some Zeiss glasses and at a given signal the factotum opened the bag and shovelled the goods inside, and the fat man tendered me a ten-pound note and asked me for change."

"About ten years ago," continued the inspector, "there were several Spanish political refugees in London — among them a certain Don Fernando Ferrarez with his young wife and child. They were very poor, and the wife was ill. Anna Rosenberg visited the place where they were lodging and asked if they had anything to sell. Don Fernando was out, and his wife decided to part with a very wonderful Spanish shawl, embroidered in a marvellous manner, which had been one of her husband's last presents to her before flying from Spain. When Don Fernando returned, he flew into a terrible rage on hearing the shawl had been sold, and tried vainly to recover it. When he at last succeeded in finding the second-hand clothes woman in question, she declared that she had resold the shawl to a woman whose name she did not know. Don Fernando was in despair. Two months later he was stabbed in the street and died as a result of his wounds. From that time onward, Anna Rosenberg seemed suspiciously flush of money. In the ten years that followed, her house at Hampstead was burgled no less than eight times. Four of the attempts were frustrated and nothing was taken; on the other four occasions, an embroidered shawl of some kind was among the booty."

The inspector paused, and then went on in obedience to an urgent gesture from Anthony.

"A week ago, Carmen Ferrarez, the young daughter of Don Fernando, arrived in this country from a convent in France. Her first action was to seek

out Anna Rosenberg at Hampstead. There she is reported to have had a violent scene with the old woman, and her words at leaving were overheard by one of the servants.

" 'You have it still,' she cried. 'All these years you have grown rich on it — but I say to you solemnly that in the end it will bring you bad luck. You have no moral right to it, and the day will come when you will wish you had never seen the Shawl of the Thousand Flowers.'

"Three days after that, Carmen Ferrarez disappeared mysteriously from the hotel where she was staying. In her room was found a name and address — the name of Conrad Fleckman, and also a note from a man purporting to be an antique dealer asking if she were disposed to part with a certain embroidered shawl which he believed she had in her possession. The address given on the note was a false one.

"It is clear that the shawl is the centre of the whole mystery. Yesterday morning Conrad Fleckman called upon Anna Rosenberg. She was shut up with him for an hour or more, and when he left she was obliged to go to bed, so white and shaken was she by the interview. But she gave orders that if he came to see her again he was always to be admitted. Last night she got up and went out about nine o'clock, and did not return. She was found this morning in the house occupied by Conrad Fleckman, stabbed through the heart. On the floor beside her was — what do you think?"

"The shawl?" breathed Anthony. "The Shawl of a Thousand Flowers."

"Something far more gruesome than that. Something which explained the whole mysterious business of the shawl and made its hidden value clear. . . . Excuse me, I fancy that's the chief ——"

There had indeed been a ring at the bell. Anthony contained his impatience as best he could, and waited for the inspector to return. He was pretty well at ease about his own position now. As soon as they took his fingerprints they would realize their mistake.

And then, perhaps, Carmen would ring up. . . .

The Shawl of a Thousand Flowers! What a strange story — just the kind of story to make an appropriate setting for the girl's exquisite dark beauty.

Carmen Ferrarez. . . .

He jerked himself back from day dreaming. What a time that inspector fellow was. He rose and pulled the door open. The flat was strangely silent. Could they have gone? Surely not without a word to him.

He strode out into the next room. It was empty — so was the sitting-room. Strangely empty! It had a bare dishevelled appearance. Good heavens! His enamels — the silver!

He rushed wildly through the flat. It was the same tale everywhere. The place had been denuded. Every single thing of value, and Anthony had a very pretty collector's taste in small

things, had been taken.

With a groan Anthony staggered to a chair, his head in his hands. He was aroused by the ringing of the front door bell. He opened it to confront Rogers.

"You'll excuse me, sir," said Rogers. "But the gentlemen fancied you might be wanting something."

"The gentlemen?"

"Those two friends of yours, sir. I helped them with the packing as best I could. Very fortunately I happened to have them two good cases in the basement." His eyes dropped to the floor. "I've swept up the straw as best I could, sir."

"You packed the things in here?" groaned Anthony.

"Yes, sir. Was that not your wishes, sir? It was the tall gentleman told me to do so, sir, and seeing as you were busy talking to the other gentleman in the little end room, I didn't like to disturb you.

"I wasn't talking to him," said Anthony. "He was talking to me — curse him."

Rogers coughed.

"I'm sure I'm very sorry for the necessity, sir," he murmured.

"Necessity?"

"Of parting with your little treasures, sir."

"Eh? Oh, yes. Ha, ha!" He gave a mirthless laugh. "They've driven off by now, I suppose. Those — those friends of mine, I mean?"

"Oh, yes, sir, some time ago. I put the cases on the taxi and the tall gentleman went upstairs again, and then they both came running down and drove off at once. . . . Excuse me, sir, but is anything wrong, sir?"

Rogers might well ask. The hollow groan which Anthony emitted would have aroused surmise anywhere.

"Everything is wrong, thank you, Rogers. But I see clearly that you were not to blame. Leave me, I would commune a while with my telephone."

Five minutes later saw Anthony pouring his tale into the ears of Inspector Driver, who sat opposite to him, note-book in hand. An unsympathetic man, Inspector Driver, and not (Anthony reflected) nearly so like a real inspector! Distinctly stagey, in fact. Another striking example of the superiority of Art over Nature.

Anthony reached the end of his tale. The inspector shut up his note-book.

"Well?" said Anthony anxiously.

"Clear as paint," said the inspector. "It's the Patterson gang. They've done a lot of smart work lately. Big fair man, small dark man, and the girl."

"The girl?"

"Yes, dark and mighty good-looking. Acts as decoy usually."

"A — a Spanish girl?"

"She might call herself that. She was born in Hampstead."

"I *said* it was a bracing place," murmured Anthony.

"Yes, it's clear enough," said the inspector, rising to depart. "She got you on the phone and pitched you a tale — she guessed you'd come along

all right. Then she goes along to old Mother Gibson's who isn't above accepting a tip for the use of her room for them as finds it awkward to meet in public — lovers, you understand, nothing criminal. You fall for it all right, they get you back here, and while one of them pitches you a tale, the other gets away with the swag. It's the Pattersons all right — just their touch."

"And my things?" said Anthony anxiously.

"We'll do what we can, sir. But the Pattersons are uncommon sharp."

"They seem to be," said Anthony bitterly.

The inspector departed, and scarcely had he gone before there came a ring at the door. Anthony opened it. A small boy stood there, holding a package.

"Parcel for you, sir."

Anthony took it with some surprise. He was not expecting a parcel of any kind. Returning to the sitting-room with it, he cut the string.

It was a liqueur set!

"Damn!" said Anthony.

Then he noticed that at the bottom of one of the glasses there was a tiny artificial rose. His mind flew back to the upper room in Kirk Street.

"I do like you — yes, I do like you. You will remember that whatever happens, won't you?"

That was what she had said. *Whatever happens.* . . . Did she mean ——

Anthony took hold of himself sternly.

"This won't do," he admonished himself.

His eye fell on the typewriter, and he sat down with a resolute face.

THE MYSTERY OF THE SECOND CUCUMBER

His face grew dreamy again. The Shawl of a Thousand Flowers. What was it that was found on the floor beside the dead body? The gruesome thing that explained the whole mystery?

Nothing, of course, since it was only a trumped-up tale to hold his attention, and the teller had used the old Arabian Nights' trick of breaking off at the most interesting point. But couldn't there be a gruesome thing that explained the whole mystery? Couldn't there? If one gave one's mind to it?

Anthony tore the sheet of paper from his typewriter and substituted another. He typed a headline:

THE MYSTERY OF THE SPANISH SHAWL

He surveyed it for a moment or two in silence.

Then he began to type rapidly. . . .

Katharine Fullerton Gerould, American novelist, essayist, and short-storyist and one of the most discerning critics of her time, once wrote in "The Yale Review" that Wilbur Daniel Steele was one of the handful of writers whose name on a magazine cover invariably made her stop, look — and buy. This statement was made more than twenty years ago; it could have been made with equal truth by many thousands of short-story lovers a mere twenty minutes ago. For Wilbur Daniel Steele has not lost his magic — witness his outstanding success of 1945, the novel THAT GIRL FROM MEMPHIS.

No other American writer of short stories can boast Mr. Steele's remarkable record during the 1910s and 1920s. Five times winner of O. Henry Memorial prizes, including a special award for maintaining the highest level of merit among American short-story writers, Mr. Steele is an acknowledged master of the short form. He has not often invaded the Coast of Criminalia, but at least two of his short stories are classic victories. We brought you one ("Blue Murder" in our November 1942 issue) and now we bring you another — a superb study of crime and punishment that reveals once more what Edith Ronald Mirrielees said of Mr. Steele's work: "with substance, with powerful delineation, with a mastery over words which leaves phrase after phrase ringing in the mind — with all this, Steele is in the line of his great predecessors."

It is curious to note that Wilbur Daniel Steele was born in Greensboro, North Carolina — where O. Henry was also born. Does the Greensboro Chamber of Commerce properly exploit so proud an honor? — or, adapting the words of Mark Twain, has the Greensboro Chamber of Commerce "exalted [its native sons] to the grand chief place in the list of genuine marvels [North Carolina] has produced?" Whether the citizens of North Carolina are properly appreciative or not, those in the short-story "know" are, and they welcome with undiminished ardor the storytelling art of "The Man Who Saw Through Heaven," the man who understands the true nature of "The Body of the Crime," the man who can hold you breathless in your easy chair "listening, listening intently, through the waking hours of nine years" for the sound of "Footfalls."

FOOTFALLS

by WILBUR DANIEL STEELE

THIS is not an easy story; not a road for tender or for casual feet. Better the meadows. Let me warn you, it is as hard as that old man's soul and as sunless as his eyes. It has its inception in catastrophe, and its end in

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an act of almost incredible violence; between them it tells barely how a man, being blind, can become also deaf and dumb.

He lived in one of those old Puritan sea towns where the strain has come down austere and moribund, so that his act would not be quite unbelievable. Except that the town is no longer Puritan and Yankee. It has been betrayed; it has become an outpost of the Portuguese islands.

This man, this blind cobbler himself, was a Portuguese, from St. Michael, in the Western Islands, and his name was Boaz Negro.

He was happy. An unquenchable exuberance lived in him. When he arose in the morning he made vast, as it were uncontrollable, gestures with his stout arms. He came into his shop singing. His voice, strong and deep as the chest from which it emanated, rolled out through the doorway and along the street, and the fishermen, done with their morning work and lounging and smoking along the wharfs, said, "Boaz is to work already." Then they came up to sit in the shop.

In that town a cobbler's shop is a club. One sees the interior always dimly thronged. They sit on the benches watching the artizan at his work for hours, and they talk about everything in the world. A cobbler is known by the company he keeps.

Boaz Negro kept young company. He would have nothing to do with the old. On his own head the gray hairs set thickly.

He had a grown son. But the benches in his shop were for the lusty and valiant young, men who could spend the night drinking, and then at three o'clock in the morning turn out in the rain and dark to pull at the weirs, sing songs, buffet one another among the slippery fish in the boat's bottom, and make loud jokes about the fundamental things, love and birth and death. Harkening to their boasts and strong prophecies, his breast heaved and his heart beat faster. He was a large, full-blooded fellow, fashioned for exploits; the flame in his darkness burned higher even to hear of them.

It is scarcely conceivable how Boaz Negro could have come through this much of his life still possessed of that unquenchable and priceless exuberance; how he would sing in the dawn; how, simply listening to the recital of deeds in gale or brawl, he could easily forget himself a blind man, tied to a shop and a last; easily make of himself a lusty young fellow breasting the sunlit and adventurous tide of life.

He had had a wife, whom he had loved. Fate, which had scourged him with the initial scourge of blindness, had seen fit to take his Angelina away. He had had four sons. Three, one after another, had been removed, leaving only Manuel, the youngest. Recovering slowly, with infinite agony, from each of these recurrent blows, his unquenchable exuberance had lived. And there was another thing quite as extraordinary. He had

never done anything but work, and that sort of thing may kill the flame where an abrupt catastrophe fails. Work in the dark. Work, work, work! And accompanied by privation; an almost miserly scale of personal economy. Yes, indeed, he had "skinned his fingers," especially in the earlier years. When it tells most.

How he had worked! Not alone in the daytime, but also, sometimes, when orders were heavy, far into the night. It was strange for one, passing along that deserted street at midnight, to hear issuing from the black shop of Boaz Negro the rhythmical tap-tap-tap of hammer on wooden peg.

Nor was that sound all: no man in town could get far past that shop in his nocturnal wandering unobserved. No more than a dozen footfalls, and from the darkness Boaz's voice rolled forth, fraternal, stentorian, "Good night, Antone!" "Good night to you, Caleb Snow!"

To Boaz Negro it was still broad day.

Now, because of this, he was what might be called a substantial man. He owned his place, his shop, opening on the sidewalk, and behind it the dwelling-house with trellised galleries upstairs and down.

And there was always something for his son, a "piece for the pocket," a dollar, five, even a ten-dollar bill if he had "got to have it." Manuel was "a good boy." Boaz not only said this; he felt that he was assured of it in his understanding, to the infinite peace of his heart.

It was curious that he should be ignorant only of the one nearest to him. Not because he was physically blind. Be certain he knew more of other men and of other men's sons than they or their neighbors did. More, that is to say, of their hearts, their understandings, their idiosyncrasies, and their ultimate weight in the balance-pan of eternity.

His simple explanation of Manuel was that Manuel "wasn't too stout." To others he said this, and to himself. Manuel was not indeed too robust. How should he be vigorous when he never did anything to make him so? He never worked. Why should he work, when existence was provided for, and when there was always that "piece for the pocket"? Even a ten-dollar bill on a Saturday night! No. Manuel "wasn't too stout."

In the shop they let it go at that. The missteps and frailties of every one else in the world were canvassed there with the most shameless publicity. But Boaz Negro was a blind man, and in a sense their host. Those reckless, strong young fellows respected and loved him. It was allowed to stand at that. Manuel was "a good boy." Which did not prevent them, by the way, from joining later in the general condemnation of that father's laxity — "the ruination of the boy!"

"He should have put him to work."

"He should have said to Manuel, 'Look here, if you want a dollar, go earn it first.' "

As a matter of fact, only one man ever gave Boaz the advice direct.

That was Campbell Wood. And Wood never sat in that shop.

In every small town there is one young man who is spoken of as "rising." As often as not he is not a native, but "from away."

In this town Campbell Wood was that man. He had come from another part of the State to take a place in the bank. He lived in the upper story of Boaz Negro's house, the ground floor now doing for Boaz and the meager remnant of his family. The old woman who came in to tidy up for the cobbler looked after Wood's rooms, too.

Dealing with Wood, one had first of all the sense of his incorruptibility. A little ruthless perhaps, as if one could imagine him, in defense of his integrity, cutting off his friend, cutting off his own hand, cutting off the very stream flowing out from the wellsprings of human kindness. An exaggeration, perhaps.

He was by long odds the most eligible young man in town, good-looking in a spare, ruddy, sandy-haired Scottish fashion, important, incorruptible, "rising." But he took good care of his heart. Precisely that; like a sharp-eyed duenna to his own heart. One felt that here was the man, if ever was the man, who held his destiny in his own hand. Failing, of course, some quite gratuitous and unforeseeable catastrophe.

Not that he was not human, or even incapable of laughter or passion. He was, in a way, immensely accessible. He never clapped one on the shoulder; on the other hand, he never failed to speak. Not even to Boaz.

Returning from the bank in the afternoon, he had always a word for the cobbler. Passing out again to supper at his boarding-place, he had another, about the weather, the prospects of rain. And if Boaz was at work in the dark when he returned from an evening at the Board of Trade, there was a "Good night, Mr. Negro!"

On Boaz's part, his attitude toward his lodger was curious and paradoxical. He did not pretend to anything less than reverence for the young man's position; precisely on account of that position he was conscious toward Wood of a vague distrust. This was because he was uneducated.

To the uneducated the idea of large finance is as uncomfortable as the idea of the law. It must be said for Boaz that, responsive to Wood's unfailing civility, he fought against the sensation of dim and somehow shameful distrust.

Nevertheless his whole parental soul was in arms that evening when, returning from the bank and finding the shop empty of loungers, Wood paused a moment to propose the bit of advice already referred to.

"Haven't you ever thought of having Manuel learn the trade?"

A suspicion, a kind of premonition, lighted the fires of defense.

"Shoemaking," said Boaz, "is good enough for a blind man."

"Oh, I don't know. At least it's better than doing nothing at all."

Boaz's hammer was still. He sat silent, monumental. Outwardly. For

once his unfailing response had failed him, "Manuel ain't too stout, you know." Perhaps it had become suddenly inadequate.

He hated Wood; he despised Wood; more than ever before, a hundredfold more, quite abruptly, he distrusted Wood.

How could a man say such things as Wood had said? And where Manuel himself might hear!

Where Manuel *had* heard! Boaz's other emotions — hatred of contempt and distrust — were overshadowed. Sitting in darkness, no sound had come to his ears, no footfall, no infinitesimal creaking of a floor-plank. Yet by some sixth uncanny sense of the blind he was aware that Manuel was standing in the dusk of the entry joining the shop to the house.

Boaz made a Herculean effort. The voice came out of his throat, harsh, bitter, and loud enough to have carried ten times the distance to his son's ears.

"Manuel is a good boy!"

"Yes — h'm — yes — I suppose so."

Wood shifted his weight. He seemed uncomfortable.

"Well, I'll be running along, I — ugh! Heavens!"

Something was happening. Boaz heard exclamations, breathings, the rustle of sleeve-cloth in large, frantic, and futile graspings — all without understanding. Immediately there was an impact on the floor, and with it the unmistakable clink of metal. Boaz even heard that the metal was minted, and that the coins were gold. He understood. A coin-sack, gripped not quite carefully enough for a moment under the other's overcoat, had shifted, slipped, escaped, and fallen.

And Manuel had heard!

It was a dreadful moment for Boaz, dreadful in its native sense, as full of dread. Why? It was a moment of horrid revelation, ruthless clarification. His son, his link with the departed Angelina, that "good boy" — Manuel, standing in the shadow of the entry, visible alone to the blind, had heard the clink of falling gold, and — *and Boaz wished that he had not!*

There, amazing, disconcerting, destroying, stood the sudden fact.

Sitting as impassive and monumental as ever, his strong, bleached hands at rest on his work, round drops of sweat came out on Boaz's forehead. He scarcely took the sense of what Wood was saying. Only fragments.

"Government money, understand — for the breakwater workings — huge — too many people know, here, everywhere — don't trust the safe — tin safe — 'Noah's Ark' — give you my word — Heavens, no!"

It boiled down to this — the money, more money than was good for that antiquated "Noah's Ark" at the bank — and whose contemplated sojourn there overnight was public to too many minds — in short, Wood was not only incorruptible, he was canny. To what one of those minds, now, would it occur that he should take away that money bodily, under

casual cover of his coat, to his own lodgings behind the cobbler-shop of Boaz Negro? For this one, this important, night!

He was sorry the coin-sack had slipped, because he did not like to have the responsibility of secret sharer cast upon any one, even upon Boaz, even by accident. On the other hand, how tremendously fortunate that it had been Boaz and not another. So far as that went, Wood had no more anxiety now than before. One incorruptible knows another.

"I'd trust you, Mr. Negro" (that was one of the fragments which came and stuck in the cobbler's brain), "as far as I would myself. As long as it's only you. I'm just going up here and throw it under the bed. Oh, yes, certainly."

Boaz ate no supper. For the first time in his life food was dry in his gullet. Even under those other successive crushing blows of Fate, the full and generous habit of his functionings had carried on unabated; he had always eaten what was set before him. To-night, over his untouched plate, he watched Manuel with his sightless eyes, keeping track of his every mouthful, word, intonation, breath. What profit he expected to extract from this catlike surveillance it is impossible to say.

When they arose from the supper-table Boaz made another Herculean effort. "Manuel, you're a good boy!"

The formula had a quality of appeal, of despair, and of command.

"Manuel, you should be short of money, maybe. Look, what's this? A tenner? Well, there's a piece for the pocket; go and enjoy yourself."

He would have been frightened had Manuel, upsetting tradition, declined the offering. With the morbid contrariness of the human imagination, the boy's avid grasping gave him no comfort.

He went out into the shop, where it was already dark, drew to him his last, his tools, mallets, cutters, pegs, leather. And having prepared to work, he remained idle. He found himself listening.

It has been observed that the large phenomena of sunlight and darkness were nothing to Boaz Negro. A busy night was broad day. Yet there was a difference; he knew it with the blind man's eyes, the ears.

Day was a vast confusion, or rather a wide fabric, of sounds; great and little sounds all woven together, voices, footfalls, wheels, far-off whistles and foghorns, flies buzzing in the sun. Night was another thing. Still there were voices and footfalls, but rare, emerging from the large, pure body of silence as definite, surprizing, and yet familiar entities.

To-night there was an easterly wind, coming off the water and carrying the sound of waves. So far as other fugitive sounds were concerned it was the same as silence. The wind made little difference to the ears. It nullified, from one direction at least, the other two visual processes of the blind, the sense of touch and the sense of smell. It blew away from the

shop, toward the living-house.

As has been said, Boaz found himself listening, scrutinizing with an extraordinary attention this immense background of sound. He heard footfalls. The story of that night was written, for him, in footfalls.

He heard them moving about the house, the lower floor, prowling here, there, halting for long spaces, advancing, retreating softly on the planks. About this aimless, interminable perambulation there was something to twist the nerves, something led and at the same time driven, like a succession of frail and indecisive charges.

Boaz lifted himself from his chair. All his impulse called him to make a stir, join battle, cast in the breach the reënforcement of his presence, authority, good will. He sank back again; his hands fell down. The curious impotence of the spectator held him.

He heard footfalls, too, on the upper floor, a little fainter, borne to the inner rather than the outer ear, along the solid causeway of partitions and floor, the legs of his chair, the bony framework of his body. Very faint indeed. Sinking back easily into the background of the wind. They, too, came and went, this room, that, to the passage, the stair-head, and away. About them too there was the same quality of being led and at the same time of being driven.

Time went by. In his darkness it seemed to Boaz that hours must have passed. He heard voices. Together with the footfalls, that abrupt, brief, and (in view of Wood's position) astounding interchange of sentences made up his history of the night. Wood must have opened the door at the head of the stair; by the sound of his voice he would be standing there, peering below perhaps; perhaps listening.

"What's wrong down there?" he called. "Why don't you go to bed?"

After a moment, came Manuel's voice, "Ain't sleepy."

"Neither am I. Look here, do you like to play cards?"

"What kind? Euchre? I like euchre all right. Or pitch."

"Well, what would you say to coming up and having a game of pitch then, Manuel? If you can't sleep?"

"That'd be all right."

The lower footfalls ascended to join the footfalls on the upper floor. There was the sound of a door closing.

Boaz sat still. In the gloom he might have been taken for a piece of furniture, of machinery, an extraordinary lay-figure, perhaps, for the trying on of the boots he made. He seemed scarcely to breathe, only the sweat starting from his brow giving him an aspect of life.

He ought to have run, and leaped up that inner stair and pounded with his fists on that door. He seemed unable to move. At rare intervals feet passed on the sidewalk outside, just at his elbow, so to say, and yet somehow, to-night, immeasurably far away. Beyond the orbit of the moon. He heard Rugg, the policeman, noting the silence of the shop, muttering,

"Boaz is to bed to-night," as he passed.

The wind increased. It poured against the shop with its deep, continuous sound of a river. Submerged in its body, Boaz caught the note of the town bell striking midnight.

Once more, after a long time, he heard footfalls. He heard them coming around the corner of the shop from the house, footfalls half swallowed by the wind, passing discreetly, without haste, retreating, merging step by step with the huge, incessant background of the wind.

Boaz's muscles tightened all over him. He had the impulse to start up, to fling open the door, shout into the night, "What are you doing? Stop there! Say! What are you doing and where are you going?"

And as before, the curious impotence of the spectator held him motionless. He had not stirred in his chair. And those footfalls, upon which hinged, as it were, that momentous decade of his life, were gone.

There was nothing to listen for now. Yet he continued to listen. Once or twice, half arousing himself, he drew toward him his unfinished work. And then relapsed into immobility.

As has been said, the wind, making little difference to the ears, made all the difference in the world with the sense of feeling and the sense of smell. From the one important direction of the house. That is how it could come about that Boaz Negro could sit, waiting and listening to nothing in the shop and remain ignorant of disaster until the alarm had gone away and come back again, pounding, shouting, clanging.

"*Fire!*" he heard them bawling in the street. "*Fire! Fire!*"

Only slowly did he understand that the fire was in his own house.

THERE is nothing stiller in the world than the skeleton of a house in the dawn after a fire. It is as if everything living, positive, violent, had been completely drained in the one flaming act of violence, leaving nothing but negation till the end of time. It is worse than a tomb. A monstrous stillness! Even the footfalls of the searchers can not disturb it, for they are separate and superficial. In its presence they are almost frivolous.

Half an hour after dawn the searchers found the body, if what was left from that consuming ordeal might be called a body. The discovery came as a shock. It seemed incredible that the occupant of that house, no cripple or invalid, but an able man in the prime of youth, should not have awakened and made good his escape. It was the upper floor which had caught; the stairs had stood to the last. It was beyond calculation. Even if he had been asleep!

And he had not been asleep. This second and infinitely more appalling discovery began to be known. Slowly. By a hint, a breath of rumor here; there an allusion, half taken back. The man, whose incinerated body still lay curled in its bed of cinders, had been dressed at the moment of disaster;

even to the watch, the cuff-buttons, the studs, the very scarf-pin. Fully clothed to the last detail, precisely as those who had dealings at the bank might have seen Campbell Wood any week-day morning for the past eight months. A man does not sleep with his clothes on. The skull of the man had been broken, as if with a blunt instrument of iron. On the charred lacework of the floor lay the leg of an old andiron with which Boaz Negro and his Angelina had set up housekeeping in that new house.

It needed only Mr. Asa Whitelaw, coming up the street from that gaping "Noah's Ark" at the bank, to round out the scandalous circle of circumstance.

"Where is Manuel?"

Boaz Negro still sat in his shop, impassive, monumental, his thick, hairy arms resting on the arms of his chair. The tools and materials of his work remained scattered about him, as his irresolute gathering of the night before had left them. Into his eyes no change could come. He had lost his house, the visible monument of all those years of "skinning his fingers." It would seem that he had lost his son. And he had lost something incalculably precious — that hitherto unquenchable exuberance of the man.

"Where is Manuel?"

When he spoke his voice was unaccented and stale, like the voice of a man already dead.

"Yes, where is Manuel?"

He had answered them with their own question.

"When did you last see him?"

Neither he nor they seemed to take note of that profound irony.

"At supper."

"Tell us, Boaz, you knew about this money?"

The cobbler nodded his head.

"And did Manuel?"

He might have taken sanctuary in a legal doubt. How did he know what Manuel knew? Precisely! As before, he nodded his head.

"After supper, Boaz, you were in the shop? But you heard something?"

"Yes."

He went on to tell them what he had heard, the footfalls, below and above, the extraordinary conversation which had broken for a moment the silence of the inner hall. The account was bare, the phrases monosyllabic. He reported only what had been registered on the sensitive tympanums of his ears, to the last whisper of footfalls stealing past the dark wall of the shop. Of all the formless tangle of thoughts, suspicions, interpretations, and the special and personal knowledge given to the blind which moved in his brain, he said nothing.

He shut his lips there. He felt himself on the defensive. Just as he distrusted the higher ramifications of finance (his house had gone down uninsured), so before the rites and processes of that inscrutable creature, the Law, he felt himself menaced by the invisible and the unknown, helpless, oppressed; in an abject sense, skeptical.

"Keep clear of the Law!" they had told him in his youth. The monster his imagination had summoned then still stood beside him in his age.

Having exhausted his monosyllabic and superficial evidence, they could move him no farther. He became deaf and dumb. He sat before them, an image cast in some immensely heavy stuff, inanimate. His lack of visible emotion impressed them. Remembering his exuberance, it was only the stranger to see him unmoving and unmoved. Only once did they catch sight of something beyond. As they were preparing to leave he opened his mouth. What he said was like a swan-song to the years of his exuberant happiness. Even now there was no color of expression in his words, which sounded mechanical.

"Now I have lost everything. My house. My last son. Even my honor. You would not think I would like to live. But I go to live. I go to work. That *cachorra*, one day he shall come back again, in the dark night, to have a look. I shall go to show you all. That *cachorra!*"

(And from that time on, it was noted, he never referred to the fugitive by any other name than *cachorra*, which is a gender of dog. "That *cachorra!*" As if he had forfeited the relationship not only of the family, but of the very genus, the very race! "That *cachorra!*")

He pronounced this resolution without passion. When they assured him that the culprit would come back again indeed, much sooner than he expected, "with a rope around his neck," he shook his head slowly.

"No, you shall not catch that *cachorra* now. But one day ——"

There was something about its very colorlessness which made it sound oracular. It was at least prophetic. They searched, laid their traps, proceeded with all their placards, descriptions, rewards, clues, trails. But on Manuel Negro they never laid their hands.

Months passed and became years. Boaz Negro did not rebuild his house. He might have done so, out of his earnings, for upon himself he spent scarcely anything, reverting to his old habit of an almost miserly economy. Yet perhaps it would have been harder after all. For his earnings were less and less. In that town a cobbler who sits in an empty shop is apt to want for trade. Folk take their boots to mend where they take their bodies to rest and their minds to be edified.

No longer did the walls of Boaz's shop resound to the boastful recollections of young men. Boaz had changed. He had become not only different, but opposite. A metaphor will do best. The spirit of Boaz Negro had been a meadowed hillside giving upon the open sea, the sun, the warm, wild winds from beyond the blue horizon. And covered with flowers, always hungry and thirsty for the sun and the fabulous wind and bright showers of rain. It had become an entrenched camp, lying silent, sullen, verdureless, under a gray sky. He stood solitary against the world. His approaches

were closed. He was blind, and he was also deaf and dumb.

Against that, what can young fellows do who wish for nothing but to rest themselves and talk about their friends and enemies? They had come and they had tried. They had raised their voices even higher than before. Their boasts had grown louder, more presumptuous, more preposterous, until, before the cold separation of that unmoving and as if contemptuous presence in the cobbler's chair, they burst of their own air, like toy balloons. And they went and left Boaz alone.

There was another thing which served, if not to keep them away, at least not to entice them back. That was the aspect of the place. It was not cheerful. It invited no one. In its way that fire-bitten ruin grew to be almost as great a scandal as the act itself had been. It was plainly an eyesore. A valuable property, on the town's main thoroughfare — and an eyesore! The neighboring owners protested.

Their protestations might as well have gone against a stone wall. That man was deaf and dumb. He had become, in a way, a kind of vegetable, for the quality of a vegetable is that, while it is endowed with life, it remains fixed in one spot. For years Boaz was scarcely seen to move foot out of that shop that was left him, a small, square, blistered promontory on the shores of ruin.

He must indeed have carried out some rudimentary sort of a domestic program under the débris at the rear (he certainly did not sleep or eat in the shop). One or two lower rooms were left fairly intact. The outward aspect of the place was formless; it grew to be no more than a mound in time; the charred timbers, one or two still standing, lean and naked against the sky, lost their blackness and faded to a silvery gray. It would have seemed strange, had they not grown accustomed to the thought, to imagine that blind man, like a mole, or some slow slug, turning himself mysteriously in the bowels of that gray mound — that time-silvered "eyesore."

When they saw him, however, he was in the shop. They opened the door to take in their work (when other cobblers turned them off), and they saw him seated in his chair in the half-darkness, his whole person, legs, torso, neck, head, as motionless as the vegetable of which we have spoken — only his hands and his bare arms endowed with visible life. The gloom had bleached the skin to the color of damp ivory, and against the background of his immobility they moved with a certain amazing monstrousness, interminably. No, they were never still. One wondered what they could be at. Surely he could not have had enough work now to keep those insatiable hands so monstrously in motion. Even far into the night. Tap-tap-tap! Blows continuous and powerful. On what? On nothing? On the bare iron last? And for what purpose? To what conceivable end?

Well, one could imagine those arms,

growing paler, also growing thicker and more formidable with that unceasing labor; the muscles feeding themselves omnivorously on their own waste, the cords toughening, the bone-tissues revitalizing themselves without end. One could imagine the whole aspiration of that mute and motionless man pouring itself out into those pallid arms, and the arms taking it up with a kind of blind greed. Storing it up. Against a day!

"That *cachorra!* One day ——"

What were the thoughts of the man? What moved within that motionless cranium covered with long hair? Who can say? Behind everything, of course, stood that bitterness against the world — the blind world — blinder than he would ever be. And against "that *cachorra.*" But this was no longer a thought; it was the man.

Just as all muscular aspiration flowed into his arms, so all the energies of his senses turned to his ears. The man had become, you might say, two arms and two ears. Can you imagine a man listening, intently, through the waking hours of nine years?

Listening to footfalls. Marking with a special emphasis of concentration the beginning, rise, full passage, falling away, and dying of all the footfalls. By day, by night, Winter and Summer and Winter again. Unraveling the skein of footfalls passing up and down the street!

For three years he wondered when they would come. For the next three years he wondered if they would ever come. It was during the last three that a doubt began to trouble him. It gnawed at his huge moral strength. Like a hidden seepage of water, it undermined (in anticipation) his terrible resolution. It was a sign perhaps of age, a slipping away of the reckless infallibility of youth.

Supposing, after all, that his ears should fail him. Supposing they were capable of being tricked, without his being able to know it. Supposing that that *cachorra* should come and go, and he, Boaz, living in some vast delusion, some unrealized distortion of memory, should let him pass unknown. Supposing precisely this thing had already happened!

Or the other way around. What if he should hear the footfalls coming, even into the very shop itself. What if he should be as sure of them as of his own soul? What, then, if he should strike? And what, then, if it were not that *cachorra* after all? How many tens and hundreds of millions of people were there in the world? Was it possible for them all to have footfalls distinct and different?

Then they would take him and hang him. And that *cachorra* might then come and go at his own will, undisturbed.

As he sat there sometimes the sweat rolled down his nose, cold as rain.

Supposing!

Sometimes, quite suddenly, in broad day, in the booming silence of the night, he would start. Not outwardly. But beneath the pale in-

tegument of his skin all his muscles tightened and his nerves sang. His breathing stopped. It seemed almost as if his heart stopped.

Was that it? Were those the feet, there, emerging faintly from the distance? Yes, there was something about them. Yes! Memory was in travail. Yes, yes, yes! No! How could he be sure? Ice ran down into his empty eyes. The footfalls were already passing. They were gone, swallowed up already by time and space. Had that been that *cachorra?*

Nothing in his life had been so hard to meet as this insidious drain of distrust in his own powers; this sense of a traitor within the walls. His iron-gray hair had turned white. It was always this now, from the beginning of the day to the end of the night; how was he to know? How was he to be inevitably, unshakably sure?

Curiously, after all this purgatory of doubts, he did know them. For a moment at least, when he had heard them, he was unshakably sure.

It was on an evening of the Winter holidays, the Portuguese festival of *Menin' Jesus.* Christ was born again in a hundred mangers on a hundred tiny altars; there was cake and wine; songs went shouting by to the accompaniment of mandolins and tramping feet. The wind blew cold under a clear sky. In all the houses there were lights; even in Boaz Negro's shop a lamp was lit just now, for a man had been in for a pair of boots which Boaz had patched. The man had gone out again. Boaz was thinking of blowing out the light. It meant nothing to him.

He leaned forward, judging the position of the lamp-chimney by the heat on his face, and puffed out his cheeks to blow. Then his cheeks collapsed suddenly, and he sat back.

It was not odd that he had failed to hear the footfalls until they were actually within the door. A crowd of merrymakers was passing just then; their songs and tramping almost shook the shop.

Boaz sat back. Beneath his passive exterior his nerves thrummed; his muscles had grown as hard as wood. Yes! Yes! But no! He had heard nothing; no more than a single step, a single foot-pressure on the planks within the door. Dear God! He could not tell!

Going through the pain of an enormous effort, he opened his lips.

"What can I do for you?"

"Well, I — I don't know. To tell the truth ——"

The voice was unfamiliar, but it might be assumed. Boaz held himself. His face remained blank, interrogating, slightly helpless.

"I am a little deaf," he said. "Come nearer."

The footfalls came half-way across the intervening floor, and there appeared to hesitate. The voice, too, had a note of uncertainty.

"I was just looking around. I have a pair of — well, you mend shoes?"

Boaz nodded his head. It was not in response to the words, for they meant

nothing. What he had heard were the footfalls on the floor.

Now he was sure. As has been said, for a moment at least after he had heard them he was unshakably sure. The congestion of his muscles had passed. He was at peace.

The voice became audible once more. Before the massive preoccupation of the blind man it became still less certain of itself.

"Well, I haven't got the shoes with me. I was — just looking around."

It was amazing to Boaz, this miraculous sensation of peace.

"Wait!" Then, bending his head as if listening to the Winter wind, "It's cold to-night. You've left the door open. But wait!" Leaning down, his hand fell on a rope's end hanging by the chair. The gesture was one continuous, undeviating movement of the hand. No hesitation. No groping. How many hundreds, how many thousands of times, had his hand schooled itself in that gesture!

A single strong pull. With a little *bang* the front door had swung to and latched itself. Not only the front door. The other door, leading to the rear, had closed too and latched itself with a little *bang*. And leaning forward from his chair, Boaz blew out the light.

There was not a sound in the shop. Outside, feet continued to go by, ringing on the frozen road; voices were lifted; the wind hustled about the corners of the wooden shell with a continuous, shrill note of whistling. All of this outside, as on another planet. Within the blackness of the shop the complete silence persisted.

Boaz listened. Sitting on the edge of his chair, half-crouching, his head, with its long, unkempt, white hair, bent slightly to one side, he concentrated upon this chambered silence the full powers of his senses. He hardly breathed. The other person in that room could not be breathing at all, it seemed.

No, there was not a breath, not the stirring of a sole on wood, not the infinitesimal rustle of any fabric. It was as if in this utter stoppage of sound, even the blood had ceased to flow in the veins and arteries of that man, who was like a rat caught in a trap.

It was appalling even to Boaz; even to the cat. Listening became more than a labor. He began to have to fight against a growing impulse to shout out loud, to leap, sprawl forward without aim in that unstirred darkness — do something. Sweat rolled down from behind his ears, into his shirt-collar. He gripped the chair-arms. To keep quiet he sank his teeth into his lower lip. He would not! He would not!

And of a sudden he heard before him, in the center of the room, an outburst of breath, an outrush from lungs in the extremity of pain, thick, laborious, fearful. A coughing up of dammed air.

Pushing himself from the arms of the chair, Boaz leaped.

His fingers, passing swiftly through the air, closed on something. It was a sheaf of hair, bristling and thick. It was a man's beard.

On the road outside, up and down the street for a hundred yards, merry-making people turned to look at one another. With an abrupt cessation of laughter, of speech. Inquiringly. Even with an unconscious dilation of the pupils of their eyes.

"What was that?"

There had been a scream. There could be no doubt of that. A single, long-drawn note. Immensely high-pitched. Not as if it were human.

"God's sake! What was that? Where'd it come from?"

Those nearest said it came from the cobbler-shop of Boaz Negro.

They went and tried the door. It was closed; even locked, as if for the night. There was no light behind the window-shade. But Boaz would not have a light. They beat on the door. No answer.

But from where, then, had that prolonged, as if animal, note come?

They ran about, penetrating into the side-lanes, interrogating, prying. Coming back at last, inevitably, to the neighborhood of Boaz Negro's shop.

The body lay on the floor at Boaz's feet, where it had tumbled down slowly after a moment from the spasmodic embrace of his arms; those ivory-colored arms which had beaten so long upon the bare iron surface of a last. Blows continuous and powerful! It seemed incredible. They were so weak now. They could not have lifted the hammer now.

But that beard! That bristly, thick, square beard of a stranger!

His hands remembered it. Standing with his shoulders fallen forward and his weak arms hanging down, Boaz began to shiver. The whole thing was incredible. What was on the floor there, upheld in the vast gulf of darkness, he could not see. Neither could he hear it; smell it. Nor (if he did not move his foot) could he feel it. What he did not hear, smell, or touch did not exist. It was not there. Incredible!

But that beard! All the accumulated doubtings of those years fell down upon him. After all, the thing he had been so fearful of in his weak imaginings had happened. He had killed a stranger. He, Boaz Negro, had murdered an innocent man!

And all on account of that beard. His deep panic made him light-headed. He began to confuse cause and effect. If it were not for that beard, it would have been that *cachorra*.

On this basis he began to reason with a crazy directness. And to act. He went and pried open the door into the entry. From a shelf he took down his razor. A big, heavy-heeled blade, made long ago for a beard which turned the jaw black again an hour after shaving. And the old, brown, polished strop. His hands began to hurry. And the mug, half full of soap. And water. It would have to be cold. But after all, he thought (light-headedly), at this time of night ——

Outside, they were at the shop again. The crowd's habit is to forget a thing quickly, once it is out of sight and hearing. But there had been

something about that solitary cry which continued to bother them, even in memory. Where had it been? Where had it come from? And those who had stood nearest the cobbler-shop were heard again. They were certain now, dead certain. They could swear!

In the end they broke down the door.

If Boaz heard them he gave no sign. An absorption as complete as it was monstrous wrapped him. Kneeling in the glare of the lantern they had brought, as impervious as his own shadow sprawling behind him, he continued to shave the dead man on the floor.

No one touched him. Their minds and imaginations were arrested by the gigantic proportions of the act. The unfathomable presumption of the act. As throwing murder in their faces to the tune of a jig in a barber-shop. It is a fact that none of them so much as thought of touching him. No less than all of them, together with all other men, shorn of their imaginations — that is to say, the expressionless and imperturbable creature of the Law — would be sufficient to touch that ghastly man.

On the other hand, they could not leave him alone. They could not go away. They watched. They saw the damp, lather-soaked beard of that victimized stranger falling away, stroke by stroke of the flashing, heavy razor. The dead denuded by the blind!

It was seen that Boaz was about to speak. It was something important he was to utter; something, one would say, fatal. The words would not come all at once. They swelled his cheeks out. His razor was arrested. Lifting his face, he encircled the watchers with a gaze at once of imploration and of command. As if he could see them. As if he could read his answer in the expressions of their faces.

"Tell me one thing now. Is it that *cachorra?*"

For the first time those men in the room made sounds. They shuffled their feet. It was as if an uncontrollable impulse to ejaculation, laughter, derision, forbidden by the presence of death, had gone down into their boot-soles.

"Manuel?" one of them said. "You mean *Manuel?*"

Boaz laid the razor down on the floor beside its work. He got up from his knees slowly, as if his joints hurt. He sat down in his chair, rested his hands on the arms, and once more encircled the company with his sightless gaze.

"Not Manuel. Manuel was a good boy. But tell me now, is it that *cachorra?*"

Here was something out of their calculations; something for them, mentally, to chew on. Mystification is a good thing sometimes. It gives the brain a fillip, stirs memory, puts the gears of imagination in mesh. One man, an old, tobacco-chewing fellow, began to stare harder at the face on the floor. Something moved in his intellect.

"No, but look here now, by

God ——"

He had even stopped chewing. But he was forestalled by another.

"Say now, if it don't look like that fellow Wood, himself. The bank fellow — that was burned — remember? Himself."

"That *cachorra* was not burned. Not that Wood. You damned fool!"

Boaz spoke from his chair. They hardly knew his voice, emerging from its long silence; it was so didactic and arid.

"That *cachorra* was not burned. It was my boy that was burned. It was that *cachorra* called my boy up-stairs. That *cachorra* killed my boy. That *cachorra* put his clothes on my boy, and he set my house on fire. I knew that all the time. Because when I heard those feet come out of my house and go away, I knew they were the feet of that *cachorra* from the bank. I did not know where he was going to. Something said to me — you better ask him where he is going to. But then I said, you are foolish. He had the money from the bank. I did not know. And then my house was on fire. No, it was not my boy that went away; it was that *cachorra* all the time. You damned fools! Did you think I was waiting for my own boy?"

"Now I show you all," he said at the end. "And now I can get hanged."

No one ever touched Boaz Negro for that murder. For murder it was in the eye and letter of the Law. But the Law in a small town is sometimes a curious creature; it is sometimes blind only in one eye.

Their minds and imaginations in that town were arrested by the romantic proportions of the act. Simply, no one took it up. I believe the man, Wood, was understood to have died of heart-failure.

When they asked Boaz why he had not told what he knew as to the identity of that fugitive in the night, he seemed to find it hard to say exactly. How could a man of no education define for them his own but half-defined misgivings about the Law, his sense of oppression, constraint and awe, of being on the defensive, even, in an abject way, his skepticism? About his wanting, come what might, to "keep clear of the Law"?

He did say this, "You would have laughed at me."

And this, "If I told folks it was Wood went away, then I say he would not dare come back again."

That was the last. Very shortly he began to refuse to talk about the thing at all. The act was completed. Like the creature of fable, it had consumed itself. Out of that old man's consciousness it had departed. Amazingly. Like a dream dreamed out.

Slowly at first, in a makeshift, piece-at-a-time, poor man's way, Boaz commenced to rebuild his house. That "eyesore" vanished.

And slowly at first, like the miracle of a green shoot pressing out from the dead earth, that priceless and unquenchable exuberance of the man was seen returning. Unquenchable, after all.

RUSTIC RATIOCINATION

The first great Correspondence School Detective was created by Ellis Parker Butler, author of that never-to-be-forgotten classic of hilarity, PIGS IS PIGS. *Writing in the broad vein characteristic of American humor, Mr. Butler hit upon* le nom juste *for his Mail Order Master Manhunter — Philo Gubb. Roll the syllables in your mind, say the name aloud: even before you have begun to read, the picture is complete. The very sound and look of the words suggest a small-town paperhanger who commits a slight case of murder on the King's English every time he talks. The younger generation of readers will undoubtedly visualize a sort of deerstalkered Mortimer Snerd. And yet language is so tricky and so flexible an instrument of communication that when S. S. Van Dine chose the name Philo for his sophisticated dilettante, it again seemed* le nom juste. *Of course, the surnames play their subtle part in the connotations: Philo Gubb and Philo Vance — hayseed versus monocle.*

The misadventures of Philo Gubb appeared in book form in 1918. For twenty-nine years, to the best of your Editor's recollection, Philo Gubb remained the only Correspondence School Sleuth between short-story covers. But early this year the second great Mail Order detective donned cloth and dust wrapper. If you don't already own a copy of Percival Wilde's P. MORAN, OPERATIVE, *published by Random House, what in the world are you waiting for? Crime-investigators like Philo Gubb and P. Moran come only once in a generation: they are the rare birds of detection — the humorous Holmeses, the ludicrous Lecoqs. And because these comic criminologists are so few and far between, we are especially pleased to add another five-leaf clover to our collection of discoveries.*

The one and only volume about Philo Gubb contains seventeen short stories. Your Editor never dreamed that a Philo Gubb story existed outside the book published by Houghton Mifflin in 1918 and now fast disappearing from the second-hand marts. Yet such a tale does exist — an eighteenth Philo Gubb short story not included in the lemon-yellow book of our boyhood, with its unforgettable front-cover illustration showing the tall, lean, Holmesian figure of Gubb, wearing a cap and dressing gown, a long pipe sticking out of his Sherlockian face, an enormous microscope on the table behind him, a beautiful damsel sitting in the client's chair, a bookcase jammed with ponderous tomes in the background, and last but not least, a framed diploma on the wall announcing to the world that Philo Gubb had graduated from the Rising Sun Detective Agency's Correspondence

School (magna cum laude, of course).

We hope you will find delight in this unknown Philo Gubb exploit, partly because it gives you an unprecedented opportunity to recapture a thrill of your youth, and partly because "The Sword Swallower Murder" is Philo Gubb's masterpiece, his Greatest Case, all previous Greatest Cases notwithstanding.

THE SWORD SWALLOWER MURDER

by ELLIS PARKER BUTLER

PHILO GUBB, paperhanger and detective, who had taken the correspondence course in 12 easy lessons supplied by the Rising Sun Detective School, pushed his way closer to the platform in a sideshow of the great Rumford Brothers' Circus, and gawked at Tlom-Tlom, the Fiji Island scorpion eater. Tlom-Tlom was not eating scorpions at the moment.

A clown was orating at the other side of the tent, telling how wonderful Zozo, the beautiful snake charmer, was.

As Philo Gubb, who was as gawky as a flamingo and resembled one, stared at Tlom-Tlom, a fussy little man pushed up behind him. He was Dr. Bullick, a local physician.

"He's a fake; nobody can eat live scorpions," the doctor declared testily.

"He couldn't unless he drank a quart of insect poison into his stomach first to drown the scorpion to death in," Philo Gubb agreed.

"That would kill him," said Dr. Mullick. "He's a fake. All these freaks are fakes. These aren't scorpions — they're crawfish. I'd eat one myself — I'd eat a dozen."

"Boss," said Tlom-Tlom, "you is one of dese smart guys —" But he was interrupted by a piercing scream. On the platform across the tent the beautiful Zozo was standing with both hands pressed against her face while she looked down with horror at Orrin McDowd, the sword-swallower, who was writhing in death agony. As scream after scream issued from Zozo's mouth, Orrin McDowd ceased writhing and lay still.

The crowd that had been watching the sword-swallower give his performance a moment before, pushed closer. Those who had been entering or leaving the tent ran to see what was happening. Every uniformed attendant ran to the scene of the sudden death, and Philo Gubb strode across the intervening space, closely followed by Dr. Mullick. The giant picked up the dwarf and held him on his shoulder so that he could see, and the Wild Man of Borneo in his excitement grasped his tom-tom and

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began beating upon it madly, dancing and chanting the Borneo deathsong.

"Keep back! Keep back!" the attendants shouted, pushing at the crowd. "Snake loose! Poison snake loose!" and the crowd backed away from the platform as suddenly as it had gathered there. Philo Gubb by stretching his long neck was able to see over the people's heads, and he pushed forward. Dr. Mullick, although short and stout, was able to work his way to the front by repeating, "I'm a doctor; make way, please! I'm a doctor!" And when he reached the front he was boosted on to the platform, the strong man, whose stand was next to that of the deceased sword-swallower, giving him a hand.

A rapid but careful examination of the body of the dead man followed.

"Heart disease," the little doctor announced as he got to his feet. "It could be nothing else unless he was bitten by a Cerastes Amazinus, the deadly green asp of Brazil. The symptoms —"

He was interrupted by a wild cry uttered by the beautiful Zozo. She turned and looked down into a glass case of small serpents that stood at the edge of her platform."

"It's gone!" she cried. "My Amazon asp is gone!"

This glass case was not the trunk-like case out of which the beautiful Zozo took huge pythons and boa-constrictors to drape around her neck, over her shoulders, and around her waist when the lecturer called attention to her act and when she smiled so nonchalantly. It was a case with glass sides and top, containing deadly small serpents — copperheads, rattlers, asps and mambas — at which the audience could stare and shudder.

"An Amazon asp is gone?" asked Dr. Mullick, looking hastily at the platform at his feet and backing to its edge. "That accounts for this man's death; he was bitten by an Amazon asp."

"But the asp could not get out," wailed the snake-charmer. "Look — the lid is clamped; it is always clamped."

"I know nothing about that," said Dr. Mullick. "The asp did get out, and it bit this man."

Carefully, the little doctor bent over the dead man again, examining his hands and head and neck. He pushed the sword-swallower's tights as far up his legs as they would go, and pushed his sleeves up to the shoulders, but he found no marks.

"No fang marks," he said, "but they will be found somewhere on his body. Where can we take this corpse where I can give it a more thorough examination?"

"One of the tents," a guard said. "Get hold of him, Joe."

"Me? I wouldn't touch him for a million plunks. With that there snake in his clothes, maybe? And me get stang? No, sir!"

This was enough for the crowd. Except for a few whose curiosity exceeded their timidity, they rushed for the exit. The attendants began to herd the lingerers out. One of the

attendants grasped Philo Gubb's arm.

"Outside, you! Everybody out!" he shouted.

"I am not going outside of anywhere," declared Mr. Gubb. "I am a deteckative and I desire to remain here for a few moments to study into this sudden death."

"All right, Sherlock," the attendant laughed. "Hang around and get bit."

Preparations were now being made to remove the body of the sword-swallower, two husky attendants arriving with a stretcher, and the amateur detective bent down and lifted up the gay drape that hung down from that part of the platform where the sword-swallower had been doing his act. The grass under the platform was short and Mr. Gubb saw no snake there.

Under the platform was a chest, painted blue, with the words, "O. McDowd, Rumford Bros. Shows," in black. This was evidently the chest in which he kept his swords, saws and other articles used in his act. To the right, under the next section of the platform was another similar chest, also painted blue, but the lettering on this was "Samson, Rumford Bros. Shows." This was evidently the property of the strong man, whose seat had been next to that of the sword-swallower.

Mr. Gubb was about to drop the curtain when he saw that a cake of ice, about a foot square, lay against the strong man's box. The ice was melting rapidly, but there seemed to be a groove running from top to bottom of the front of the cake, and Mr. Gubb crawled under the platform on his hands and knees. He had just looked upward at the underside of the platform when two attendants grasped the tail of Mr. Gubb's coat and jerked him from under the platform vigorously.

"What do you think you are doing, you big rube?" demanded the manager of the side show. The manager's name was Culkin and he wore riding breeches and a red coat with tails. He had a long and drooping moustache and a fierce eye.

"I am a deteckative doing some deteckating," said Mr. Gubb, getting to his feet, and speaking with proper dignity.

"Yeah?" said Mr. Culkin. "And what do you think you are detecting?"

"I ain't exactly positively sure yet," said Mr. Gubb. "I haven't pursued into my investigations complete and far, but to the present moment I can say it is something or nothing or murder."

"Murder?" exclaimed Mr. Culkin. "Joe, this rube says McDowd was murdered."

"Woozy, that's what he is," said Joe. "Woozy in the head."

Detective Gubb paid no attention to this. The two huskies had put the body of the sword swallower on the stretcher and were carrying it from the tent, followed by Dr. Mullick, and Mr. Gubb looked at the platform on which Samson, the strong man,

was still calmly sitting.

The strong man was a low-browed creature with arms like a gorilla, hairy and with huge muscles, and he sat scowling with his arms folded across his massive chest.

On the platform at his feet stood iron weights labelled "200 lbs.," "500 lbs.," and "1,000 lbs.," and the huge dumbbells he used in his act. At one side stood a brilliantly painted rack from which hung the chains he broke, and against this stood a couple of iron bars and crowbars that he bent across his biceps. On his other side was a table on which were telephone directories and packs of cards to be torn with his strong hands. He let his eyes glance at Philo Gubb and then looked away indifferently, and Mr. Gubb stood there gawking at him like any rustic.

In a comparatively short time Dr. Mullick returned from a more complete examination of the sword swallower's body.

"It was heart disease after all," he said. "Not a fang-mark on any part of the body. He was not bitten by a snake."

"The escape of an asp out from its box at the same moment that a human person dies of symptoms exactly the same as an asp bite looks like a biggish sort of coincidence," said Philo Gubb.

The little doctor scowled at Gubb.

"What do you mean by that?" he asked testily. "I know what I'm talking about. I say there were no fang marks. I say the man died of heart disease. Mistreating his insides — pushing swords and saws and crowbars into his stomach —"

"Crowbars?" asked Philo Gubb. "I don't see no crowbars on to his apparatus rack, doctor. You don't need to get so angrily sore at me because I say 'coincidence.' Lesson 4 of the Rising Sun Deteckative Correspondence Lessons says 'Beware of coincidences; they are often deceiving'."

"All right, all right!" cried the doctor. "Look him over yourself, if you are so smart. See if you can find fang marks. Maybe your eyes are better than mine."

"If they were," said Philo Gubb, "maybe I could see a crowbar up amongst those saws and swords on to that rack. Your observations of fang marks, there being none, fully and completely satisfy me, doctor, but the only crowbars I see are on the strong man's rack."

The doctor, still unmollified, said: "I know what's the trouble with you, Gubb. You think you are a detective because you took that fool series of lessons. If anybody dies anywhere at any time of anything, you see murder in it. And now you keep yelping 'Crowbars! Crowbars!' If you want to know, I said crowbar because a crowbar killed this McDowd. The last thing he thrust down his throat was a crowbar. It pushed his stomach against his heart and killed him. That's all there is to it. The next thing you'll be finding a yellow hair and yelping, 'A yellow hair! Murder has been done!'"

"Into a murder case where a yellow hair was a clue," said Mr. Gubb gently, "it might be possibly a chance that I would say, 'Ha! A yellow hair!' but into this case I would not utter the exclamation of those words, because I do not see any yellow hair except onto the head of Miss Zozo, where yellow hair ain't a clue but an ornamentation. Into this case, what I say is, 'Ha! A cake of ice; maybe murder has been done.'"

"Cake of ice!" exclaimed the doctor, looking at Mr. Gubb as if the paper hanger detective had suddenly gone insane. "What are you talking about?"

The snake charmer, who had been weeping quietly, looked up as the dispute between Dr. Mullick and Mr. Gubb reached this point. The tattooed man, who sat at the far side of Miss Zozo, bent forward to look at Mr. Gubb. The strong man gave Mr. Gubb his attention. All the circus people came closer and stared at him, and the manager of the side show, Mr. Culkin, of the long moustache, pushed forward.

"What kind of a detective are you, talking nonsense like this?" he asked.

"I am a real deteckative," said Mr. Gubb simply throwing open his coat to show the large badge awarded him by the Rising Sun Correspondence School. "I have also likewise into my pocket a diploma proving the same."

Mr. Culkin laughed.

"That's the kind of detective you are, is it? One of these smart-aleck rubes. 'Twelve lessons, $20' — is that it? You're one of the guys that smell a murder every time you stub your toe on a brick, ain't you?"

"It wasn't a brick I stubbed my toe on to," said Philo Gubb patiently; "it was a chunk of ice."

"Brick or ice," said Mr. Culkin, "out you go, Mr. Smart Aleck," and he was about to order two of his men to throw Mr. Gubb out of the tent, when a black-haired little man garbed in a white jacket spoke up. He was the man in charge of the lemonade stand just inside the side show tent's entrance.

"Wait a minute, boss," he said. "Maybe this guy's got something. This morning I miss a cake of ice from my stand, see? Ten is what I ordered and I find nine." He turned to Philo Gubb. "What you know about my ice, sport?"

Mr. Gubb looked at the small dark man with eyes that hardly saw him. He was thinking.

"It might be jealousy," he said.

"Hey? Jealousy?" exclaimed the lemonade man. "What's that got to do with my cake of ice?"

"My brain was thinking out a thought," explained Mr. Gubb. "A crime has got to have a motive into it and by a possible chance jealousy might be the motive of this murder."

"If it was a murder," laughed the manager. "It's dead sure nobody would murder McDowd for his money. He hadn't any. He was overdrawn three weeks of his salary and he owed me $10 on a bet. He never had a cent. Him and Zozo there would

have got married long ago if Mac could have saved any money."

"And now he's dead!" moaned Miss Zozo rocking back and forth.

"Betting was his curse," said Culkin. "A betting fool, that was McDowd. He lost every time."

"Not always," said the tattooed man, leaning forward to speak past Miss Zozo. "He won one. Maybe the surprise of winning was too much for him and he dropped dead of shock."

"Nonsense!" declared Dr. Mullick, who never saw a joke. "It was his heart. Weak heart and swallowing a crowbar."

"That was what he bet about," said the tattooed man. "He bet he could swallow two feet of crowbar. He did, too."

Miss Zozo now wept tumultuously, her grief renewed by the words of the tattooed man, and he put his hand comfortingly on her arm. Mr. Gubb turned to him.

"Pardon the impertinence of asking you this query," he said to the tattooed man, "but are you possibly by chance in love with Miss Zozo?"

"I am indeed," said the tattooed man. "Everybody in the tent knows that — and who wouldn't be? Why, even the snakes love her."

"But you didn't hate Mr. McDowd sufficiently enough to murder him, did you?"

"McDowd? Why, mister, he was my best friend. And do I look like a murderer? Listen, friend — how would I murder him?"

"There is a ring onto your finger," said Philo Gubb to Miss Zozo, the beautiful snake charmer. "I notice it is into the form of a wedding ring."

At this Miss Zozo's tears increased.

"I'll tell you the truth," she sobbed. "It is a wedding ring. I married Orrin yesterday. I have some money, even if he never had any, and we had waited so long —"

"Was you on the spot when your husband, Mr. McDowd, made his last final fatal bet, Miss Zozo?" Philo Gubb asked.

"I was right here," Zozo sobbed. "Mr. Samson, the strong man, said to him, 'Want a bet, Dowdy?' and I said, 'Don't bet, Orrin; please, don't bet!' but Orrin said, 'What's the bet, Sammy?' 'I'll bet you a fiver you can't swallow two feet of a crowbar,' and, of course, Orrin could. He could swallow two feet of anything — just anything. Umbrellas — he swallowed one for me one time. He was wonderful — just wonderful."

At this she broke into such weeping that she could say no more, and Philo Gubb turned away from her.

"It is probably most likely," he said to Mr. Culkin, "that Sheriff Witz of this county is into the big tent seeing the show on a free ticket, and into the reserved seats. Inform him he is wanted to arrest the guilty murderer that done this crime. And," he added, "for the present meanwhile do not allow the tattooed gentleman to leave this tent."

"Me!" exclaimed the tattooed man. "You don't mean me, do you?"

"I said you," said Philo Gubb.

It was but a few minutes before Mr. Culkin, still grinning, returned with Sheriff Witz. From his hip the sheriff took a large pistol and, approached Mr. Gubb.

"What's all this?" he asked. "Who do you want arrested?"

Mr. Gubb turned and pointed his forefinger at Samson, the strong man.

"Arrest that man for the murder of Mr. McDowd," he said.

To the surprise of everyone but Philo Gubb himself, the strong man uttered an oath and leaped from the platform. A dozen arms grasped him and pinioned him to the sawdusty ground. It was a tough struggle but no strong man is as strong as he pretends to be, and at last he was subdued.

"I give up," he gasped. "I confess. I did it."

"My stars, Gubb," exclaimed Dr. Mullick, "how did you guess?"

"Into the deteckative business we do not guess," said Philo Gubb sternly. "You gave me the first clue, doctor, when you said every freak into this tent was a fake. Joe, hand me one of them chains Mr. Samson breaks into the show. One link is sawed almost through, and plastered with lead. Hand me one of them crowbars Mr. Samson bends over his arm — lead, not iron. And hollowed out. Kindly crawl down under here."

"The asp may be there," said the doctor drawing back.

"It positively ain't," said Mr. Gubb, and he raised the drape and crawled under the platform, followed by most of those in the tent.

"My ice! There it is!" cried the lemonade man.

"Into which an up-and-down groove is melted," said Philo Gubb. "And now look upwards above your heads. You will observe the sight of a hole cut through the platform."

"But what does that mean?" asked Mr. Culkin.

"It means the explication of this murder," said Mr. Gubb. "The motive was jealousy because Mr. Samson wanted to marry Miss Zozo. To murder Mr. McDowd to death he stole an Amazon asp out from Miss Zozo's case, and the cake of ice."

"But why? Why the ice?" demanded Dr. Mullick.

"Because into the hollow crowbar he put the asp, head down, and shoved the end of the crowbar down through that hole and against the ice."

"Rendering the asp inert with cold!" exclaimed Dr. Mullick. "And the serpent remained so until —"

"Until Mr. McDowd swallowed the crowbar on a bet," said Mr. Gubb, "at whereupon the crowbar warmed up and the asp crawled out of it —"

"And bit Mr. McDowd inside the stomach," exclaimed the doctor, as excitedly as if he had solved the mystery himself; "inside the stomach where fang marks would not be seen."

"And where the Amazon asp is now at," said Mr. Gubb, and forgetting where he was he stood up suddenly, hitting his head an awful crack. "Ouch!" he said.

When we originally introduced Daniel Roselle's 8th century sleuth, Charlemagne, we promised a further discussion of that curious phenomenon, the famous man of fact in the role of fictional detective. The number of examples is small but scintillating. Naturally the first that comes to mind is Lillian de la Torre's Dr. Sam: Johnson; the Great Cham of literature made his detectival début in the pages of EQMM, and the saga of his exploits, as the Great Champion of 18th century criminology, represents the finest historical detective series yet written. Last September the publishing firm of Knopf collected nine short stories about the Sage of Fleet Street and produced, under the title DR. SAM: JOHNSON, DETECTOR, *one of the most handsome books of the year — a book destined to be a modern classic.*

In the motion picture based on Robert E. Sherwood's play, "Abe Lincoln in Illinois," there is a scene in which Lincoln, as a young lawyer, defends an accused murderer. During the trial the Great Emancipator not only exonerates his client but by ingenious use of an almanac clue, pins the guilt on the real murderer. We do not know if this incident actually occurred in Abraham Lincoln's early legal career; but true or apocryphal, fact or legend, it paved the way inspirationally for the 20th century legal triumphs of Arthur Train's Mr. Tutt.

Victor Luhrs, in his book THE LONGBOW MURDER, *transformed Richard the Lion-Hearted (Coeur de Lion) into a full-fledged, 12th century detective. And, finally, although we cannot give to an airy recollection "a local habitation and a name," we dimly recall that Shakespeare was once delineated in fiction as an Elizabethan sleuth-hound.*

The device, however, is still a rarity, and that is only one of the reasons we have extended so warm a welcome to Daniel Roselle's literary conceit. We hope that Mr. Roselle will unearth sufficient Carlovingian tidbits to permit him to continue his unusual series.

CHARLEMAGNE AND THE SECRET PLANS

by DANIEL ROSELLE

"No work of men's hand but the weary years
Besiege and take it, comes its evil day:
The written word alone flouts destiny. . . ."
—HRABANUS MAURUS

AT THE height of the month of Vintage, when the Zephyr wind whipped across the lands of the Franks with the rush of the racing falcon, the prodigies and omens of the heavens cast a cloak of darkness across

the heart of the Great King Charles, noble Lord of the Franks, conqueror of Aquitania and Gascony and all the barbarous nations of the Vistula and Danube.

A black colored spot appeared in the sun for the space of seven days; a meteor crashed across the heavens with a blaze of fire greater than the glitter of all the gold of Haroun Alraschid, and the sacred church at Aix-la-Chapelle was struck by a finger of lightning which cast to the earth the golden apple that adorned the summit of the roof. Thus it was that the most August and Observant Charles, noting these signs, called a council of sages before embarking on his punitive expedition against Godofrid, King of the Danes, he in whose webbed mind there had spun a dream of conquest against the all-powerful, unconquerable Charlemagne.

They met by the light of a single candle in the private chamber of the Great King Charles, disturbed only by the occasional rumbling of the faithful dog Becerillo as he rolled in his sleep before the embers of the fire.

Now it is told that the councillors were three in number, three whose minds could cut through the wasp-head of Cicero's *De Inventione* with thoughts as sharp as the splintering adze, three who played with Victor's *Ars Rhetorica* like the twisting auger does with the oaken panel, three sages whose fingers often surpassed the fame of Donatus. There was Alcuin, tall and stately, leader of the Palace School; then the giant Dungal who probed with his eyes the ways of the earth and sky at St. Denis and Pavia; and finally, the towering Rennis who followed the swirling rivers to their sources and traced with the stylus the height of the highest mountain.

Yet you must know that great as the three were in both stature and wisdom none could compare with the glory of the noble Lord Charles. His huge body was filled with the strength of the wild boar and the steel of Pippin flowed with ancestral power through his veins. Full seven times the length of the sandal he stood, and his broad chest near burst his iron breast plate in two. His cloak was blue, his tunic garnished with the silken fringe blessed by the Bishop Waltgaud, his boots were jewelled, and a golden girdle encircled his body and pressed against the wondrous sword *De Joieuse*. His lion-like eyes were sharp and piercing now and he slowly stroked his long white beard as he spoke to his council:

"The omens of the heavens point to treachery, a treachery as foul as the stain of patricide, deeper than the body knife. Since we soon embark against the barbarous Danes in final onslaught, I fear for the success of the campaign, since the signs cry out the warning of deceit. What then is the counsel of my wise men?"

Then spoke Alcuin, wisest of the three sages:

"My most gracious Lord Charles, Emperor, Augustus, and Caesar, as sure as the flight of the swallow, so sure is the greatness and strength of your

military might in battle. Deceit avails not on the field of blood where sword and steed are the only test. The treachery, then, must come *before* the struggle and must be of such extreme quality as to assure the success of the enemy. There is but one evil deed that can fatally hurt my noble Lord Charles — the theft of the military plans for the campaign against the Danes!"

Becerillo stirred uneasily before the fire and grumbled angrily, white froth dripping slowly on his huge right paw.

"It is so," said Dungal.

"It is so," said Renis.

Alcuin went on, his eyes squinting craftily by the light of the candle: "If it then be pleasing in the eyes of my great Lord and Master, King Charles, my counsel is that when the plans and details of the campaign are drawn up, they be written not in the majuscule hand — whose letters are understandable to many men — but rather in our newly devised minuscule letters, whose curved and rounded words are readable only by your three sages, and your two military chieftains, Arkinle and Precompte. Then, should the plans be stolen by unforeseen deceit, your tactics would remain as unknown as if never written on the papyrus."

"It is good," said Dungal.

"It is good," said Renis.

And the counsel proferred by his sages delighted Lord Charles, for indeed he saw in it the ripeness of true wisdom. So it was that he decreed that each of the three should prepare a third of the manuscript written in the mystic minuscule hand, and he dictated to each separately in such a manner and with such detail of military tactics that none of them could hold in mind the true picture of the whole campaign without first reading the entire minuscule unbroken.

And when the work was completed, Alcuin, Dungal, and Renis, under the hawk-eyes of the Great King Charles, placed the manuscript in a specially prepared sheepskin holder, different in texture from all other holders, so that the words might be preserved. For only a few short hours before, the scholars had discovered that without the protection of the warmth of the special sheepskin the writing vanished into the papyrus in the space of three sunsets. And the manuscript was full twenty pages in length and held in it an unfailing military campaign against King Godofrid of the Danes.

Now you must know that in the third day of the month of Mud, when the sun shivered and withdrew behind the mountains to the east, the noble Lord Charles called his major counsel of war at Aix-la-Chapelle, commanding the attendance of the sages, Alcuin, Dungal, and Renis, and adding the presence of his two military chieftains, Arkinle and Precompte. And though the three tall scholars, clothed in fleece-white cloaks and sandals, made sharp contrast with the rigid military scaled breast-plates and chipped boots of the two short, squat men of war, yet all five found binding

unity in their purpose.

When finally they had taken the oath of secrecy by the sacred psalter, noble Charlemagne, his jewelled diadem gleaming with a golden brilliance, arose before them. As he did so, a breathless courier, his throat choked with his heart's blood, pounded furiously on the oaken door and halted his words. Gaining admittance, he threw himself into the folds of Lord Charlemagne's cloak, near dead from the race of his journey. When at last the sting of bitter wine had roused his whipped senses he told the news he carried from the frontier. A contingent of Danes had broken through the bulwarks fortifying the north passage; help must come at once lest they swarm like locust over the lands of the Franks.

Then rose Arkinle, the chieftain, saying: "If it be deemed good in the eyes of my noble Lord, I will go at once with my men and cut them down like the mowing of a field of hay. Sire, I give my word that I will not fail!"

"Make haste then," roared Lord Charles, "smash them with the fist of steel and the arm of iron. Glory to your mission!"

So Arkinle and his host of five thousand mounted warriors departed from Aix at once and a cloud of dust marked their route to the north.

Then Charlemagne, his patience sorely tried by the constant military movements of the Danes against him, addressed his four remaining councillors, saying:

"These Danish thrusts must be checked for all time. I will not rest till Godofrid grovels in the dust before me, like the outcast leper. Therefore know you now that tomorrow I begin the execution of the military plan written in the minuscule hand by my three scholars over a month ago and now guarded in the treasure room by the leader of the Palace Guards, faithful Tascan. And that there be no treachery I shall decree instructions and tactics from it day by day, so that none here present shall know the entire plan and thus be tempted to betray his monarch for the freely flowing silver of King Godofrid. This is my will!"

Shortly after, the council dispersed; each of its members carried away only his own secret thoughts.

That night was filled with Calabrian sweetness; a warmth and stillness unusual for the season pervaded the palace; no sounds but the eerie night cries of the Green forest could be heard by the sleepers. The knife entered guard Tascan's throat and ripped his veins in two; Tascan's body crumbled to the floor. The moon rose to its height and slipped back again and the day came.

Who can describe the fury of the Great King Charles when the news of Tascan's murder was told to him? Who can tell of the cold grey rage in his heart that demanded justice? He rushed to the treasure room in such haste that he stumbled over an overturned footstool that rested just beneath the high shelf where the minuscule was kept. He ripped open the

sheepskin folder, then let it drop from his hands — it was too late, the minuscule was gone!

Then the anger of Lord Charlemagne kindled anew, and raising his stout right arm to the heavens he swore in the name of his father's father to bring the guilty one to justice.

Yet little was there that pointed the way to the treacherous one. The treasure room was untouched save for the overturned stool and the empty sheepskin folder, and Tascan's body bore the only mark left by the murderer — a strange and meaningless mark — for the long black beard of the guard, token symbol of all palace warriors, that too had been cut in two with a knife.

Stool . . . sheepskin folder . . . severed beard. . . .

Silently Charlemagne strode from the room, his large shaggy head pressed tight against his chest, the fingers of his right hand opening and closing into the palm. Seated alone before the open fireplace in the great banquet hall, the faithful dog Becerillo moaning softly before the flames, he slowly stroked his beard and prayed on High for wisdom to sift out the doer of the deed. All that night he sat, and spoke not a word, his eyes fixed on the blaze before him. At last with the coming of the cold dawn in the eastern sky, and the frigid blast of the Subsolanus wind, he arose in all his majesty and praised the Great Power for the guidance and wisdom silently granted him during the night. For at last he knew that the deed could only have been done by one person — the military chieftain Precompte! Precompte's later admission of guilt and plea for mercy availed him naught, and it is said that when his head rolled in the dust Becerillo was granted leave to plunder the meat within his eye sockets.

Riding into battle against the Danes in the month of Wind, his hands clad in iron gauntlets, noble Lord Charlemagne explained to his chieftain Arkinle how he knew the guilt rested with Precompte:

"Only five men knew of the minuscule — my three scholars, Alcuin, Dungal, and Renis, my chieftain Precompte, and the murdered Tascan. Had you not departed for the north, you Arkinle would have shared in this knowledge. Tascan's severed beard pointed the way; for was it not possible for the hairs to have become entangled in the murderer's dress and required cutting away? Yet my three scholars wear plain soft garments of cloth which could not catch the beard. This is true and cannot be denied; but how easily could a scaled breast-plate worn by my military chieftains grasp and hold the entangled strands! My thoughts turned at once to Precompte.

"That which placed the noose about his neck, at first I did not see. But the overturned stool into which I stumbled near the high shelf where the minuscule was kept, plaguing my memory like a malignant growth, at last held meaning for me. My three scholars are tall men and had they

wished the theft of the manuscript, had only to reach up to the shelf and grasp it with their hands. But the overturned stool suggested that the theft had been done by a *short* man. Only Precompte of those who knew was short in stature!

"The sharpest condemnation of the traitor was the most simple of all. My three scholars, knowing that the words of the minuscule would soon disappear into the papyrus without the protective warmth of the special sheepskin holder, would never have stolen the manuscript *without taking the holder too*, for in a few short days there would be a void where once there was writing — and King Godofrid is not such a fool as to pay fortunes of silver for empty papyrus and the traitor's word that it was the original. The guilty one then had to be one who knew of the minuscule but not of the function of the sheepskin. Again only Precompte filled the breach!"

So saying, the Great King Charles whipped the side of his stallion and led his warriors to endless glory against King Godofrid and the Danes.

FOR MYSTERY LOVERS—The publishers of ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE also publish the following paper-covered mystery books at 25¢ each:

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THE PERFECT COLLABORATION

As an introductory theme to William Irish's "The Earring," in our issue of February 1946, we revealed that William Irish is a pseudonym of Cornell Woolrich, and that by virtue of Mr. Woolrich's double-barreled accomplishments he is a member-in-best-standing in that small but select society of crime-teers known as The Double-Name Club. Since the time your Editor made this revelation, a surprising number of fans have written that they still do not believe Cornell Woolrich and William Irish are one and the same person. So far as we know, Mr. Woolrich has never issued a positive statement one way or the other, but again he has let the cat out of the bag and again in a curious and interesting way. . . . The anthology titled FOURTH MYSTERY COMPANION, *published by Lantern Press in 1946, contains nineteen stories, one of which is by William Irish and another by Cornell Woolrich. It is the editorial custom of the* MYSTERY COMPANIONS *to ask each contributor to supply a short biographical note, and these 'tec tintypes are printed at the end of the book. Here is an excerpt from the biography furnished by William Irish:*

> *"William Irish is 36, brown hair, blue eyes, height 5 foot 9. Born in New York. Has a rotten disposition. . . He is married on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays."*

Compare this with an excerpt from the biography of Cornell Woolrich, as it appears in the very same book:

> *"Cornell Woolrich is 36, brown hair, blue eyes, height 5 foot 9. Born in New York. Has a fair disposition. . . . . He is married on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays."*

We submit that these two passages prove psychologically that Cornell Woolrich and William Irish are a dual personality inhabiting the selfsame body. Not that there aren't still at least two points demanding further enlightenment: Mr. Irish is self-confessedly a man of "rotten disposition"; Mr. Woolrich admits that his disposition is "fair." That discrepancy is not too difficult to understand: in the matter of temperament Irish-Woolrich simply has his good days and his bad — don't we all? But speaking of days, good or bad, there is still the remarkable matter of Sunday. If Irish is married three days a week, and Woolrich is married three other days a week, what does Irish-Woolrich do on the seventh day — Sunday? Is there a Biblical analogy here? — "and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made." No, there is another possible explana-

tion: on Sundays Irish-Woolrich must be a — bachelor!

So, perhaps the question of the Irish-Woolrich identity is not yet cleared up to everyone's satisfaction. Suppose, therefore, we probe deeper by examining internal evidence. Read "Steps Going Up" and ask yourself: who is the author of this unusual crime tale? Whose hallmark of plot and style is suggested by the atmosphere of terror and suspense in this story? There can be only two answers: the tale is the work of either Cornell Woolrich — or William Irish.

And so, we are back where we started . . .

But if a story is ever published under the name of Cornell Irish or William Woolrich, it will represent, despite the daily differences in disposition, the product of detective-storydom's most perfect collaboration.

STEPS GOING UP

by CORNELL WOOLRICH

A THREAD of silver began to creep up the left side of each of the four bars in the cell window, like mercury in a thermometer. That was all; the sky seen through them was still as black as before.

Keys clashed and the squeaky hinges of the cell grate began to turn. The commandant of the prison and an assistant dressed like a barber were standing out there in the opening.

Lamont hadn't been asleep all night. Why should he bother? He was about to get all the sleep he needed. Nothing but sleep. He turned his head slowly like a man does who knows what the interruption is about. "Already? It's not even light yet."

"It will be in another few minutes," was the answer.

They'd brought in an iron basin slopping over with cold water, and a tube of shaving cream in a nickeled holder, which was the personal property of the commandant. He must have used it lopsided on himself; it was worn down more on one side than the other, was almost chisel-shaped.

The assistant put the basin down on the edge of the bunk, spilling some on the gasoline-reeking blanket. "You filled it too full," observed Lamont. "I'm not going to take a bath."

The commandant said, "Open your collar, Lamont."

Lamont undid the top button, turned the gray flannel down all around his neck.

"Bend your head down."

Lamont lowered his head, held it that way. The barber scooped a palmful of water from the basin, strewed it all around the back of his neck. Lamont jolted from the shock, winced.

Copyright, 1939, by Cornell Woolrich

"I always did hate cold water the first thing in the morning! Couldn't you have warmed it a little?"

The commandant didn't answer; he was busy watching the barber stroke the shaving stick all over the back of Lamont's neck from ear to ear. The barber didn't go near his jaws or cheeks with it, just the nape of his neck. The commandant produced a razor, handed it to him.

"Hold still," he warned the patient. "We don't want to cut you."

Lamont turned his head and gave him a caustic look obliquely over his shoulder. "What you mean is," he said, "you don't want to cut me ahead of time."

"Quit it," the commandant almost pleaded, like a man trying to reason with someone who has him at a disadvantage.

"Keep your head down," the barber said. "I'm as nervous as a witch, and the light in here is fierce."

He brought his face close to the back of the subject's skull, peered attentively, tongue protruding from the corner of his mouth. He began to draw long, cautious, downward strokes with the razor, from under the base of the skull to the top of the spine. Tufts of hair cemented together with soapy waste rolled off, dropped to the floor. The skin looked clean and rosy underneath, the way a man's does after it is freshly shaven.

"You forgot the talcum," said Lamont satirically.

"Aw, lay off," pleaded the commandant unhappily.

"What're they afraid of, that the blade won't be able to cut through a few stray hairs on my neck?" Lamont sneered. "It can't have much of an edge."

"It's just traditional to do it; don't ask me why," the commandant answered. "I don't originate these customs. Maybe from the days when they did it by hand, and people wore pigtails down their neck."

The assistant had gone out with the basin and razor. He came back again in a few moments with the traditional glass of rum on a small tin salver, offered it to the condemned silently.

"Sure, why not? It's a chilly morning." Lamont downed it in two long streamlined gulps, coughed a little, handed it back.

"Cigarette?" The assistant produced a pair from the pocket of his blouse. Lamont took one, stuck it up vertically under his lip in Apache fashion. "Generous of the Republic," he slurred. "Are you sure it can afford it?"

The commandant struck a sulphur match on the sole of his shoe, sheltered the flame for his use. Lamont blew a great churning funnel of smoke that seemed to veil the whole cell. When it cleared again there was a priest standing there in the open doorway looking in at them.

Lamont fanned his hand at him negatively. "Thanks, no. I'm not a last-minute welsher."

"Tough baby, this one," breathed the commandant to his assistant. He got out a document with a lot of

crackling of paper, shifted slightly over so he was in the exact center of the small cubicle, cleared his throat. "Attention."

Lamont saluted derisively from the edge of one eyebrow.

"Having been found guilty of the murder of Armand Durand —"

"Tell me something I don't know," heckled Lamont.

"The trouble with my wife is, she doesn't understand me," the fat man said, drooping toward Babette.

"Poor *coco*," she intoned mechanically. She tried planting her hand against his midriff to keep from getting swamped, and nearly lost it up to the wrist, the way it sank in. She was on the very end stool at the bar; he was on the one next to her. He righted himself again, and she pulled her hand back out of the pillow-stuffing of his vest.

"I like talking about my wife," he said. "I like talking about her to other women, though. She's down at Deauville. Want to see her picture?"

"Sure, *coco*."

He brought out vast quantities of pocket literature. His bulk didn't go down any, but it should have the way he strewed business cards, letters, memoranda, a chunky wallet, all over the bar. "Here it is." He handed her a snapshot. "I always carry her picture around — to show to other women."

"She's not good enough for you, *coco*." She was holding it in front of her, but her eyes missed the top of it by a good two inches. She was reading the name and address on one of the scattered envelopes lying on the bar. Upside-down at that.

ARMAND DURAND
42 Rue Fontaine

"Let's go over to my place. I don't like it here. I don't know why you insisted on bringing me here. Come on, it's not far. I'll show you my collection of sea shells."

"What'll the servants say?"

"They're all away too."

"First let me put all this stuff back in your pockets. No, keep your hands down, let me do it for you. I like to wait on a distinguished looking man like you. This I'll put in this pocket, and this in that one down there, and this goes on this side. You shouldn't keep everything in one pocket, you should spread things around, it gives you a better figure. And you really have a fine figure, you know, if you'd only let it show properly."

"How understanding you are! *She* calls me fat."

"Ridiculous, *coco!* Bah, I hate these skinny bean poles." She balanced the wallet speculatively in her hand before returning it to his inside pocket. "Do you always carry that much money around on you? You shouldn't."

"That's only my spending money for this evening. I've got ten times that much on tap over at my house. She only goes to Deauville once a year, you know; I have to make hay while the sun shines. Come on over, we can sit there and talk much more comfortably."

"First just let me play one more tune on the music box."

"That thing gives me a headache."

"Just for me, *coco*." She pinched his chin — the top one — and strolled over to the mechanical music contraption. One of the other customers had the same idea at about the same time she did. He came up to it from the opposite direction, brass disc clutched in his hand ready to be inserted. They both got there together, eyed one another coldly, ready to dispute priority.

"After I'm through, if you don't mind," she said in quite a loud voice.

"You've been monopolizing it all evening," he said surlily. "Why don't you give somebody else a chance?"

The fat man on the bar stool looked unhappy, as though afraid he might have to take up the cudgels in her defense if things went much further.

She put down her own brass disc on top of the instrument with a clash, as though staking her claim, bent down, pretending to lip-read the titles of the selections listed next to the slots.

"Armand Durand, 42 Rue Fontaine. Nobody home, and a wad of dough loose around the place. Make it fast. I'll hold him here until you get back."

She picked up her brass ringer, thrust it into the slot she had chosen. A brass door key that had rested under it stayed behind on top of the cabinet. Not for long. He leaned his elbow on the edge, and it disappeared.

Strangled sounds started to thump out, she turned her back on him and moved defiantly away. So he turned his back on her, and went the other way.

"Such types you meet in these places," she complained to her rotund escort. "Did you see the look I got just because I wanted to use the coin piano ahead of him?"

"Let's go, I told you I didn't like it here anyway."

"First just one more little drink, eh? Just one more little drink with baby." Out of the corner of her mouth that was nearest the barman she managed to slur: "Strong enough to make him forget where he lives," without being overheard, close as she was to him.

It was one too many. He evidently didn't realize his own limitations. His color began to change rapidly. When it had reached pea green, he suddenly clapped a hand to his mouth, got off the stool with a thump, and floundered through the nearest inner door.

"Stormy weather," she remarked knowingly to the barman.

He came staggering out again in about five minutes. His hand was at the top of his head this time, as if to keep it from flying off. He started to go straight past her on his way out, as though he couldn't see straight any more either.

"Wait, *coco!*" she squealed alarmedly, jumping down from her perch. "You're not leaving, are you?"

His eyes rolled unseeingly at her. For him she didn't exist any more, he was in too much trouble. He had no

stomach left for dalliance. "Oh-h, let me get out of here," he shuddered.

She tried to hold him back, even to the extent of hanging onto the tail of his coat with both hands. He was too bulky, even when he was feeling rocky, and she was too slender; he simply towed her after him. "Wait, sit down a minute! He'll give you something to settle your stomach."

He flung her off tormentedly. "Oh-h, get away from me! When I'm sick I don't want strange women around me, I want my Marie. Oh-h, why did she have to go to Deauville? She always puts cold applications on my head and holds my hand when I . . ."

The rest of it was lost as he went waveringly out to the street, got in a taxi, and was whisked off.

Everyone in the place was laughing — except Babette. She returned to her original place at the bar with a face long enough to reach her garters. "Damn it, if I'd only gotten his phone number, I could ring his place up and — But no, there's no use phoning. *He* wouldn't answer."

"Take it easy," soothed the barman. "You don't have to work that hard for a few lousy drinks."

"You don't get it. If he gets home too soon and catches Lamont there, Lamont'll kill him as sure as anything."

"According to the penal code, section such and such, article so and so," droned the commandant. He folded the document, replaced it in his pocket.

Lamont was sitting there on the edge of the bunk, whistling a few bars of parade music. "Is the concert over? That's good," he jeered.

The commandant motioned him to his feet. "It's time."

The hair-line of silver along the edges of the bars had spread to half their width now. Lamont got up, took a hitch in his trousers, started toward the cell door, the cigarette they had given him still between his fingers. The commandant walked on one side of him, the assistant on the other.

Two guards were standing out there on either side of the cell opening and they fell into position as he came out, replacing the commandant and assistant. The priest tried to insinuate himself at his elbow. Again Lamont made that gesture of rebuff with his hand.

"I don't want anyone trailing after me. I'm not going far, and I can make it alone. Besides, I've got some thinking to do, and I can think better when there's no mumbling going on around me."

"Don't you want to ask forgiveness for your sins, my poor son?"

"Some other time," said Lamont coarsely. "There are too many to remember offhand; it would take an accountant to keep track of them all."

"But there will be no other time. In a few moments it will be too late!"

Lamont glanced at one of the stony-faced guards pacing slowly beside him. "Some people don't know how to take a snub," he commented good-naturedly.

"What a front," marveled the assistant. "The guy must have a hide as thick as plate armor!"

"It's put on," whispered the commandant knowingly. "Watch him crack when he gets to the top step."

Lamont walked down the passageway between the two guards, still drawing on the cigarette he had been given. The smoke came trailing back over his shoulder like a jaunty plume.

Babette was sitting on the high stool at the far end of the bar that she always occupied, legs crossed up to her chin nearly, fiddling around with a vermouth cassis. There was a man in a belted topcoat perched on the second stool up from her. He had a complexion as sallow as citron, and the dipped brim of his hat made a sort of black eye-mask across the upper half of his face. There was another man on the second stool up from him. The one in-between was again vacant.

There were a few tables around, with one or two of Copain's regular patrons slumped at them. There was a player piano over in the corner. Every once in a while the second man would get up and go over and drop a washer in that he'd bought from Copain, and it would grind out a five-year-old tune, swallowing most of its own notes.

Babette looked too good for the place tonight, but then goodness is only relative after all. She had on a coat of squirrel fur, and a moderate-sized diamond ring on her finger. It was too small to be imitation. Her fiddling with the stem of her glass kept getting more and more agitated.

Copain finally edged up along the inside of the bar, suggested dryly: "Bite your nails, if you have to, but don't break my glasses."

She let go of it with a ringing impact.

The man with the shadowy eye-mask said, still staring straight in front of him: "Nervous, sister?"

"What do you care?" she flashed at him with white hate.

She slipped off the stool, started to drift along the outside of the bar toward the street entrance. Something held her up, she looked down, and his leg was sticking straight out from the hip, barring her way. He'd swivelled around on the stool, reared it, all in a single move. "What's your hurry?" he said. He wasn't trying to flirt.

She controlled herself remarkably well, considering the provocation. "I'm going in that door, there," she said, thumbing across her shoulder.

"O.K., but you were turned the wrong way, that's all." His leg stayed out.

She swept around, went over the other way, and inside. It ebbed shut after her, showing a little white enamel sign: *Dames.*

She came to life on the other side of it, went streaking across the small enclosure to the window at the opposite end of it. The glass was doubly opaque, blown that way in the first place and then covered with a patina of gray dust that hadn't been dis-

turbed in years. She caught at it by the two finger-holds set in the bottom of the frame, strained upward. It was stuck, cemented fast by that same accumulated dust around its seams.

She reared one silken knee to the low sill to get leverage, pulled for all she was worth. It still wouldn't budge. She pounded despairingly at it all around the wooden frame with the heel of her hand, to try and loosen it up. She gave a look over her shoulder, as if to see whether she was making too much noise. Luckily that second barfly had the piano pounding away out there full-blast just then. It still wouldn't go up.

She rounded a fist, swung her whole arm back past her shoulder, drove it forward hard. The window went up an inch or two. She got a grip on it from below and shot it up the rest of the way. Then she stared and her face twisted disappointedly. She slowly brought her upraised leg down off the sill again. The opening was barred on the outside.

She came out to the bar again in a minute, smoking a cigarette. The man on the third stool down didn't turn around to look at her. He simply murmured, "How'd you like the view through the bars?" as she settled down on her own stool again.

She didn't answer. The other one had just finished another of his round trips to the music box. Above the noise she suddenly said to Copain with desperate urgency: "Give me a straight brandy, quick!" He'd hardly taken his hand off it than the little jigger was empty. Lamont was coming up to the bar from the street door.

None of the three turned to look at him, neither herself nor the two barflies. He straddled the vacant stool between Babette and the man in the belted topcoat. The man looked the other way. Babette looked down at the floor.

Lamont winked at Copain, said: "Introduce me to this good-looking customer of yours."

It didn't go over. She didn't raise her head, and Copain didn't crack a smile. "What'll you have, *m'sieu?*" he asked with strained formality.

"Hennessy, and a benedictine for the lady."

Her head came up at that. "I don't know you," she said with almost frightened intensity. "I don't let strangers buy my drinks."

A look of complete astonishment spread over his face. "Are you crazy?" he murmured under his breath.

She stared him straight between the eyes. "I never saw you before in my life. Can't I sit here without being pestered by every stranger that comes in?"

He nodded with ponderous understanding. "Oh, I get it." A bone-shaped wad of tightly packed money rolled along the edge of the bar toward her. There was a diamond ring caught under the elastic that bound it. "Here, buy yourself a new memory."

She appealed to Copain, panic-stricken. "Will you tell this man to leave me alone?" she wailed. "I'm a

respectable woman! What does he mean by —"

She broke off short, eyes dilated. A hand had come to rest on Lamont's shoulder, from in back of him. He turned, looked up the arm to the face of the man with the hat making the shadowy eye-mask, standing beside him now. The other one was standing in back of him.

"Come on, let's go and talk things over," the first one said. "Kind of got rich quick, didn't you?" He picked up the wad of bills and the ring.

The girl dropped off her stool, flashed out alongside them as they started for the door with Lamont between them. "Wait, aren't you going to take me too?"

The one in the topcoat gave her a push that sat her back on the stool again and rocked it like a pendulum. "Who the hell wants you? You served your purpose. We knew he'd come to you."

She got up a second time, caught up with them just as they reached the street door. "Wait!" she pleaded. She stepped up close to Lamont, rose on tiptoes, pressed her lips to his. "Take this with you, so you'll understand what I was trying to do just now."

"What was it, vanilla or cinnamon?" sneered one of the detectives, as they rough-housed him out between them.

She went slowly back to her place at the bar again. There was no one at it now but Copain, polishing glasses.

"Why couldn't he have stayed away from me for one night?" she lamented. She buried her head in her arms on top of the bar.

"Try crying a little more quietly, can't you?" he said irritably after a while. "Everyone's looking at you."

"Looks like it's going to be a nice day," said Lamont cheerfully, as the courtyard gate swung open before him and his escorts.

The prison wings walling in the enclosure on three sides were still black at the bottom, platinum-colored along their tops with the first rays of daylight.

There were two short lines of people standing there motionless in the gloom, not more than ten or twelve in all. They were all bare-headed in spite of the chill air.

Lamont laughed unaffectedly. "In honor of my death — they think!" he said.

The platform, of newly planed unpainted planks, was the most conspicuous thing in the enclosure. It stood out even in the gloom. Little curls of planed-off wood lay scattered about on the ground. Two tall uprights projected themselves from it against the white dawn-clouds scurrying across the slate sky.

"They made enough racket last night putting that thing up," Lamont interjected. "I didn't mind for myself, but it must have kept all the other poor devils in the place awake."

He glanced scornfully at the small group of spectators. "People that get up this early, even for an execution, are fools."

He and his escort moved slowly away from the inner gate, until they were standing at the foot of the platform. His eyes traveled appraisingly up it to the top. "Twenty steps," he said. "That's a lot of steps. I never did like climbing much, why don't they make them lower?"

"Have you anything to say?"

Lamont turned toward the witnesses. "Stick around, it'll be even more fun watching me come down than watching me go up."

A gasp went up at his boldness. They shifted uneasily. He turned his back on them. The guard on each side of him cupped a hand to his elbow, to support him.

"That's all right," Lamont said quietly. "I can make it."

He raised his left foot and set it down on the first plank step, then brought the right one up to the second. . . .

Lamont had an elbow hooked around each of the end bars in the cell window, was resting his chin sullenly on his sandwiched hands just inside them.

The grate wailed open behind him. "Have you an appointment?" he growled, without turning his head.

"Five minutes, eh?" the voice of the guard said under his breath to someone. The apparatus banged closed again, his footfalls died off down the cement corridor outside.

Lamont knew there was someone in the cell with him. He still wouldn't turn around and look.

A tapering white hand crept down each of his shoulders, intercrossed to form an embrace around his throat. A faint fragrance of verbena, whose trade-name was "*Mon Homme*," wafted about him, and silken hair caressed the back of his head.

He didn't move. His eyes glittered balefully. Suddenly he gave a violent fling, the interlocked arms were burst open, and she was flung back against the side wall of the cell.

She didn't say anything, although the impact must have hurt her; in her silence was her forgiveness. The diamond and the squirrel coat were gone; she was all in black.

"What'd *you* come around for?" he glowered. "To make sure there wasn't a gold tooth in my head you overlooked the first time? You can look it over when it tumbles into the basket, you ghoul!"

She kept looking at him pleadingly. "Yes, I was that way until I met you."

"Until! You mean to say you haven't already found somebody else? Don't tell me you're losing your knack."

"You're blind! I took things from you, yes, but not because they were things, only because they were from you."

He looked her over. "What'd you do, get cleaned at the races? Or is that your death-cell visiting costume?"

"They went to pay for our lawyer."

His face changed for the first time. "Are you kidding? I thought the Tribunal appointed him."

"I was afraid to take any chances. In the end it didn't do any good anyway."

He went over to her, looked at her puzzledly. "What's come over you?"

"I'm in love," she said quietly.

He shook his head. "You poor monkey. You're going to have a guy without a head on your hands in a couple weeks more."

The guard showed up, hitched his head at her through the bars. She turned on him with a flash of her old self again. "Get out of here! That wad I slipped you ought to be good for another ten minutes at least!"

He slunk off again, grumbling: "I'm liable to get fired for it, it's against the regulations."

She turned back to Lamont again, took a stranglehold on his prison-shirt with both hands. "I'm not going to let you go."

"Try stopping me," he snickered morosely.

"I've never been licked yet. There must be some way, there must be something I can do!"

"Maybe you can make the President."

She had no time even to shudder at that. "You've been found guilty by the Seine Tribunal. He's the only one can commute your sentence. A commutation would mean life imprisonment, and that would mean Devil's Island."

"No, thanks," he said hastily, grimacing with repulsion, "I'll take mine the quick way."

"It's got to be an outright pardon, then. Lamont, on what grounds does he issue pardons? Help me! You know more about these things than I do."

"Only when it has been proved there's been a miscarriage of justice."

"No help there. They left no doubts at all at the trial. That lawyer told me it was no use. When else?"

"If public sympathy is sufficiently aroused in favor of the condemned, and people start drumming up a campaign."

"No help there either. We're just a couple of Apaches, with records long enough to fly a kite on. And is that all? Are those the only reasons?"

"The only ones I can think of offhand." He shrugged. "Oh, sure, once in a blue moon when the state executioner passes away, it's traditional to offer a pardon to the next man in line for 'shortening.' But that's just a freak case, that only happens maybe once in forty, fifty years. They live a long time, those birds."

She let go of his shirt-front, stepped slowly back. Her eyes were hard as sequins. "This one isn't going to," she breathed almost inaudibly.

He stared at her uncomprehendingly. She turned without another word and began rapping on the bars of the grate, in as big a hurry to be let out now as she had been to stay.

"Babette," he exclaimed hoarsely. "What are you thinking of doing? Are you crazy? Come back here a minute, listen to me!"

She shrugged his hand off her shoulder. "I'm going to get you pardoned, *bebé*. Don't ask me any ques-

tions. That knife blade with your name on it is never going to fall."

The right foot; the ninth step. The left; the tenth. The right; the eleventh. Lamont's eyes were up on a level with the base of the execution platform now. He saw the basket there, filled with sawdust and shavings. He shook the thing that was supposed to drop into it — his head — almost imperceptibly, as if to say "No, not *this* one."

He saw the bottom of the apparatus, the wooden slab with the U-shaped depression in it. Several feet higher up between the two uprights was a second one, the mate to it. It would be brought down, when they were ready, joined to the first. The two U-shaped gaps would unite to form a perfect circle — with his neck in between.

He saw feet standing around. He didn't bother looking up to the faces over them. *He* wasn't there yet, that was all that mattered. Two things weren't there yet — *he* and *it*. The executioner and the blade.

The left foot; the twelfth step. The right one; the — Ah no, nothing doing, not that one! That was the thirteenth. Not at a time like this, you bet not! He lifted his right foot higher still, skipped one, brought it down on the fourteenth. That would bring him up to the top quicker, but he wasn't touching that thirteenth step on his own execution scaffold for love or money.

His action threw a slight hitch into the rhythm of his guards' ascent. It took him up a step higher than they. At least, one leg was. They didn't know why he'd done it, they weren't counting them like he was, but they corrected the discrepancy by both taking a quick in-between step on the thirteenth, then coming up even with him.

They didn't say anything, but he knew what they must be thinking: it was the first time in their experience that the condemned had ever taken two steps at a time, as if in a hurry to get up there quicker. Well, it was going to be the first time in their experience that the condemned hung around on the guillotine platform waiting for the executioner to show up, too — and then being left stranded up there, in the end, when he didn't. There was an old expression, "Waiting at the church door." This would be something new — waiting at the guillotine.

The left foot; the fifteenth step. The right; the sixteenth . . .

It was a little inconspicuous family café on a side street, with the same faces there every night. She came in looking saintly and hard-working, a black scarf draped around her head that gave her a madonna-like air, a basket of blood-red carnations under her arm. A bottle of red ink, back in her room, told how they had got some, if not all, of their unusual color, which was far deeper than anything ever seen in nature.

She moved slowly from table to table, intoning monotonously, "Car-

nations? Two for five. Carnations?" No one bought. They were too red for most tastes. The checker players, the newspaper readers, the political arguers, didn't even look at her. She was already a familiar sight here, seemed to have made the place her regular beat for some unknown reason. No one had ever yet seen her make a sale. The waiter even said, "You never give up, do you?" as he passed her.

No, she thought, I never do.

That same up-ended newspaper, held rigid on its reading stick, was over in the far corner, against the wall. That, too, had been here every night, with a small black coffee before it, and sometimes one slim, refined looking hand resting on the table below it. A voice always came from behind it, each time she strayed over toward it: "Got one already, thanks."

She tried again tonight, just the same. "Carnations?" she purred, coming to a dead stop before it. "Two for five. The reddest you've ever seen."

The paper flattened abruptly, to reveal a benevolent looking gentleman of about fifty-eight or sixty, not a mean line in his round face; periwinkle-blue eyes, innocent as a child's, behind steel-rimmed reading glasses.

"Oh, excuse me, I see you have a flower already," she said.

He drew it slowly out of his lapel, looked at it, then at hers. He must have already glimpsed the vivid hue of her wares nights ago, without her knowing it, perhaps through a rent in his paper. Tonight curiosity — or professional envy — had finally got the better of him. "I thought I had the reddest one in town. I see yours are even redder still. Would you mind telling me where you get them?"

"I grow them myself," Babette said demurely.

His face lit up with interest. "Sit down a minute. I grow my own flowers, too. That is my only recreation. Remarkable, what results you obtain. They look almost artificial, and yet they are real, one can tell that by touching them. How do you do it? What seeds do you use? What soil?"

The whole conversation became a monologue. Even if she had had any technical knowledge on the subject, and she didn't, only the smattering that a quick reading of a handbook on garden flowers had managed to give her, she wouldn't have had a chance to use it. All she was able to put in from time to time was: "I do, too," and, "So do I." He was a very lonely old man, and starving for a good talk on his particular hobby.

"So you get them from Normandy, from your people. How I would love to try them out in my own garden!"

"I'll bring some around to you. Where can I find you?"

"39 *Rue de la Terrasse.*" He was so overjoyed, the precautions of a lifetime melted away.

"Will Thursday suit you?" she asked, knowing damned well what Thursday was.

He dropped his eyes. "No, I have an early morning appointment."

"Wednesday evening, then."

"Fine! You won't forget?" he said almost pleadingly.

She gave him an eloquent look from under her lashes. "I'm not likely to, *m'sieu*."

The waiter flagged her on her way out. "Do you know who that was you were just talking to?"

"Who?"

"The state executioner. Don't spread it around or you will frighten our other customers away. He comes here every night."

She tried to act horrified. It didn't go over very well. It went over well enough to fool the waiter.

His right foot was already resting on the platform itself. Slowly, draggingly, his other broke from the twentieth and last step, came up beside it.

Below, the courtyard was still a blue pool of night, but the tops of the prison buildings all around him were already white with daylight. The faces down below, turned upward staring at him, were like so many blurred white ovals.

The guards who had come up with him started to lead him slowly around in back of the two tall uprights. They were harmless as yet, they couldn't hurt him, the "Widow" had no teeth. The knife wasn't in place between them.

The executioner wasn't up here yet either. They shouldn't have brought Lamont out so soon. Everything should have been in readiness by the time he made his appearance. Somebody had botched things up. They had been so sure the man who had never once been late in forty years, would be at his post by the time the victim reached the summit, that they had gone ahead. There would be a big scandal as a result; "unnecessary cruelty." His pardon would be granted all the more readily because of it.

He was standing behind the death thing now. He centered the canal of vision that ran down between the two parallels on the outer courtyard gate, like one centers a target through the sights of a gun; held it steadily in focus through there from then on.

The executioner was supposed to come in through there. But he wouldn't. There were a pair of armed guards waiting there by it, ready to open it on the instant. The instant that would never come.

A cigarette was burning on the edge of the table. There was a calendar on the wall. The first twenty-three days of the current month had been crossed off one by one. Beyond them there was still one blank date block left, then came a large red bull's eye, scoring the twenty-fifth day of the month. And seventeen hours of the last blank space were already gone; it was five o'clock in the afternoon. That was all right, Babette wanted it to be late, she would catch the executioner at his supper.

She took a long pin and turned over the dead cockroaches onto their backs one by one. Dead, lifeless, stiff they were; hard as coffee beans. It must be

good stuff, whatever it was.

It was in a little cylindrical shaker, not much different than the shakers pepper and stuff come in. It came out gray, though. She sprinkled a little on the newspaper that held the dead insects. She lowered her face carefully toward it. No odor. And as for taste: "It's sweet, it attracts them," the drug clerk had assured her. "I can guarantee its efficacy. But you have no children around the house, have you? It's very deadly, you know."

"I have no children," she had smiled enigmatically.

It had taken the poison from ten to fifteen minutes with the roaches. She had timed it. Of course, she couldn't tell when they actually died, only when they stopped moving. Maybe they lived on a few minutes, paralyzed, after they stopped moving. With a human being it should take longer. Double it, no triple it might be better; forty-five minutes before the first effects became noticeable. Hell, she was no physiologist, just a woman in love.

"Sometime during the night, anyway," she murmured aloud. It depended, of course, on how much you gave. In this case it was going to be the whole container. She didn't just want to postpone the execution, she wanted to cancel it altogether. He wasn't so young any more either, that would help make it — permanent.

She wondered if it would hurt much. Well, naturally, it wouldn't be exactly comfortable until the paralysis or torpor set in. It couldn't be helped. If a stomach pump were used in time, or a quick antidote administered, he could be saved. But he probably wouldn't know what it was in time. He'd think it was indigestion first, and then a cramp, and then appendicitis — and by that time it would be too late to save him. The stuff would have to go into something where its sweetish content wouldn't be out of place, otherwise he was liable to notice it, stop before he'd got all he should.

She wrapped a pocket handkerchief around the container, first making sure the little punctures at the top were sealed by the metal top. Then she thrust it into the pocket of the cheap coat sweater she wore, where it would be easier to get at than in a handbag. She had stripped the protective label off, and a flick of her thumbnail would lift the entire lid when the time came.

She picked up the little envelope containing carnation seeds. She had bought them for a couple of sous. They would come up as the ordinary white kind if they were ever planted, but he wouldn't be alive to see that.

She opened the door, started out. Then she stepped back for a minute, took a pencil, and crossed out the last blank date on the calendar. They were all crossed out now, up to the red bull's-eye. Her face was white, beautiful, and deadly, as she closed her room door after her. 39 *Rue de la Terrasse*, he had said.

The outline of a watching fellow inmate showed behind nearly every

barred window around the three sides of the prison courtyard. They stood there perfectly motionless, not a sound could be heard. That breathless silence attendant upon an execution hung like a pall over the darkly looming well populated buildings. They wouldn't want to look, some of them; those that were due for it themselves; but they wouldn't be able to stay away from their cell windows.

He could see the little white bulges their fists made gripping the uprights, two to each opening, all around the three sides. It was barbarous to let them watch; and this was supposed to be a civilized country. They condemned the Americans for galvanizing them to death, plugging them in like living lamps! He supposed the prison authorities let them look on as a sort of deterrent.

He kept staring through the uprights at the gate. There was a complete, waiting silence, both above and below, with the low pulse of tension already beginning to be felt through it.

He was almost crooning over them, like a child does a new toy. He was in the garden behind his cottage. He had a sprinkling can in his hand, an old tattered straw hat on his head to keep the setting sun out of his eyes, and he was puttering around between the flower beds in a pair of old carpet slippers. And he had killed about four hundred people!

"Are you coming in or do you want the meal to get cold?" the hatchet-faced housekeeper called disapprovingly from the back door. Her disapproval was probably equally for his never-ending flowers and Babette's intrusion here.

"You must let me pay you for them," the executioner said to Babette, turning toward the house.

"Oh, no, I wouldn't think of it. Accept them as a gift."

"No, no, I insist. After you've put yourself out coming all the way across town like this, it's the least I can do —"

She let him get the back door open, then she said wistfully, "Mmn, that smells good." She couldn't notice a thing.

"Of course! How thoughtless of me! You must be hungry. Will you join us?"

Us. Her heart sank. That meant that hawk-eyed old battle ax must sit right at the same table with him. With both of them there she'd never have a chance to pull the stunt off. "I'm afraid it would be putting you out."

"Nonsense. Now you come in. I won't take no for an answer." And to the gargoyle: "I've asked *Mademoiselle* to have a bite with us."

"You have," she grunted dryly.

As they took their places at the table ahead of her, he whispered to Babette on the side: "Don't pay any attention to her, she's always a little crabby like this."

Looking around her, it was hard to believe she was in the house of — whom she was. Just a suburban cot-

tage with chintz curtains. She was spooning soup with one hand, holding the handkerchief-wrapped cylinder in the other, in readiness below table level.

The housekeeper spoke for the first time since they'd sat down, as if trying to exclude Babette from the conversation. "Did you go to the Ministry this afternoon?"

"Of course," he said shortly, as if he didn't like the topic.

Babette knew what she meant — the Ministry of Justice. She eyed the soup tureen speculatively. But he probably wouldn't take a second plate. And it was over on the housekeeper's side of the table, anyway. She'd never work it, never.

"Did they give you the Order, and your expense money for tomorrow?"

"Naturally! Must we talk about it now?" There was no mistaking his impatience. He glanced meaningfully at their guest.

The order for the execution, she meant.

"It's the only chance I get," the old woman answered tartly. "You're so taken up in your flowers, every minute of the time you're home!" She got up and went out, came in again with a dish of stew. Babette's hand, poised just under the table-rim with the cylinder in it, dropped down to her lap again. She was bending over it so damned protectively, portioning it out, almost as if she suspected something.

"The pale pink ones go best," she answered his question, hardly knowing what she was saying at all. "There isn't as much demand for the whites or reds."

That glass of red wine of his was within easy reach of her. If she could get him to turn his head away from it. She pushed with her thumbnail and felt the head of the canister drop off into her lap; she stuck it in her sweater-pocket. Her eyes stabbed speculatively across his shoulder. The window overlooking the street was to his left, far enough over so he'd have to turn to see out of it.

And the old crow? She'd have to turn too, the opposite way, toward the right. But she'd still be three-quarters-face this way. It was almost certain not to succeed. And yet she had to try it, there was no more time and this was probably the last course.

She gazed through the window, her face seemed to light up with admiration. "Look at that! What a beautiful sunset that is!"

The two heads shifted. Her hand swiftly shot above the table. Just in time her eyes sought the face of the old woman, whom she was the more afraid of of the two. She was looking, neither at the window nor at Babette herself, but at the wall behind the latter, getting the sunset by indirection. Babette knew without looking there must be a mirror hanging there, showing not only the street but her own back as well.

With just the slightest of awkward hitches her hand rose the rest of the way, far above where it had intended to, touched the balled-up handker-

chief it grasped to the tip of her nose a couple of times, dropped down again to safe oblivion in her lap. She prayed the container hadn't been visible.

"It's magnificent," he agreed, turning back.

"It's as usual," scoffed the old woman.

Babette turned her head casually, glanced behind her. There was a long mirror just past her chair, set into the top of the sideboard. The wine glass stood out conspicuously in it. Any move of her own hand toward it would have been perfectly visible from the rear. That old wench! Had she done that purposely, did she scent something, or was it just her innate peskiness?

She went out, came back with a plate of apples. She polished them off with her apron one by one, set them back again.

"Oh, then we're not going to have sweet pancakes?" said Babette innocently.

"What made you think we were?" snapped the termagant.

"Oh, nothing. Only I saw a mixing bowl standing in there with some stuff beaten up in it, when I passed through the kitchen, and I thought —"

"Well, you were wrong. That's the dough for the biscuits for *m'sieu's* breakfast tomorrow morning. I make them myself."

"I get up extremely early on *certain* occasions," he explained, trying to temper her crossness, "and she has no time to prepare them then, has to mix them and set them out the night before."

"Now I know where it goes," exulted Babette inwardly, "if the Devil only gives my hand a lift!"

"At what time in the evening do you usually start out to sell these flowers of yours?" asked the housekeeper pointedly, as though she suspected Babette of having another trade entirely.

"Usually around eight, when the after-supper trade begins to arrive at the cafés. I'll have to be leaving in a few minutes."

"There is no hurry, my child," her host said paternally. "Sit and rest first."

The doorbell rang and a whistle blew outside. The housekeeper jumped. "There's the postman. It must be a letter from my sister." She went running out to the door.

Babette was only a second behind her in getting up. "May I have a glass of water? I'm so thirsty. Don't trouble. I know where to find it." A moment later she was standing over the mixing bowl in the kitchen, the canister of death upside-down above it. She even gave the bottom of it a good thump, so every last grain would be sure to come out. She gave the wooden spoon a couple of turns around in it, so it wouldn't all clog up in one place.

The housekeeper was standing in full sight in the opposite doorway when she went back, but she was lost in the letter which she was standing reading there. Her face had grown twenty years younger. She was off-guard at last. She hadn't even noticed

that their guest had left the table. "She says Jeanne's expecting another baby, what do you think of that!"

"I'll have to go now, *m'sieu*," simpered Babette, all sunshine and sweetness. She lowered her eyelashes demurely. "It'll kill him long before he gets anywhere near my Lamont," she was thinking complacently.

A voice from one of the cell openings croaked out abruptly: "Take him down!" It was like the crack of a whip in the stillness. The shattered silence closed in again from all sides — for only a moment. Then other voices started to take it up all around the courtyard. They rang out hollowly, echoing back from the stone façades of the prison buildings. "Take him down off there! Have a heart, you lousy dogs!"

"He was to be killed just once, not a hundred times over!"

"No executioner, no execution!"

The cries blended as they found a catchword, rose to a terrible thumping dirge. "Down! Down! *Down!*"

Lamont never took his eyes from that gate, seen through the open sluice of the guillotine. He didn't even take time off to blink.

The man with the blood-red carnation in his buttonhole came out of the front door of the rambling cottage at 39 *Rue de la Terrasse* at exactly 4:45 A.M. It was pitch dark still and the street lights were still on. In his right hand he carried a heavy ebony cane on which was an engraved plate; in his left a black leather bag, twenty-eight inches long, eight inches high. In it, on a bed of black velvet, its edge ground to razor-sharpness, lay that thing which belonged between those two uprights Lamont was staring through so steadily.

He was a man going to work, just like any other. He was still brushing the last stray biscuit crumbs from the corner of his mouth and the edge of his mustache. He shook his head peevishly. "Too sweet," he grumbled. "Too sweet. They'll give me heartburn. She is losing her knack."

The possibility of being assailed by a digestive disturbance at the exact moment of performing his job filled him with concern. Suppose he committed the ghastly impropriety of hiccoughing, or even belching, up there on the platform in front of everyone; that would be a fine thing, wouldn't it? Death was entitled to a certain respect, solemnity. The last moments of even the lowest of criminals deserved consideration and dignity.

He walked the two suburban blocks from the cottage to the end of the subway line, went downstairs, bought a second-class ticket at the change booth, took his place behind the barrier, bag in hand. A few early-morning workers slowly collected behind him — charwomen, porters, busboys. The first train of the day came in, the barrier was raised, and he entered. There were plenty of seats at this early hour. He sat in the far corner, placed his bag carefully across his

knees, rather than trust it to the floor, and rested both hands on the head of his cane.

He was not nervous. What he had to do today, he had been doing for forty years, and his father before him. It was their metier. It was a job that had to be done. And only he, in all of France, had the legal right to do it. From Strassburg to the Pyrenees, and from Brittany to the Italian border, not a human life could be taken by law, but through his hands. He and he alone was the delegate of forty million people, to carry out their order. He was a well traveled man; he had been to nearly every city or large town in the country at one time or another. This, today, was not far; just a half-hour's train trip outside the city.

He studied the advertising placards below the car ceiling, to keep his mind occupied, while the subway swiftly carried him downtown. His stomach felt quite heavy by now. The stuffy subway air, no doubt. "I should have refused that last plateful," he thought. "But I was afraid of offending her. She always takes it as a personal slight if I don't finish off the whole batch."

He consulted his old-fashioned watch. If he hurried, he'd have time to get off, get a cup of coffee to settle his stomach. He decided to do this rather than risk a belch in the midst of the execution.

He got off, hurriedly swallowed some black coffee, but he wasn't feeling any better when he got on another subway train.

And added to his pain was nervousness. He had cut his time too thin. He would get there a little late now. He hunched in his seat to ease the strange agony in his belly, and then the guard called his station. He rose, clutching his bag. Yes, he felt distinctly "heavy" beneath the vest, all the recent springiness had gone from his gait.

"I'll feel better as soon as I get up to the street again," he assured himself. "These metro-tubes have been closed up all night without ventilation."

He found it rather arduous climbing the long flight of steps to street level, was panting and felt weak at the knees when he finally reached the top. Despite his lateness, he could not move faster.

It was still dark out, but downtown here the city was already fully awake. Lighted busses rolled by, people were already out and about their business. The railroad station was directly opposite, on the other side of the square. He crossed over to it, entered the vast cavern of its main waiting room, stepped up to one of the wickets. "A round-trip ticket to R——," he said. "Second-class, of course."

He saw the ticket seller glance at him curiously as he returned his change.

"Does he recognize me?" he wondered. That always made him feel uncomfortable, even at this late date. But the look hadn't been one of recognition, it had been more one of questioning concern. He stopped before a mirrored weighing machine on

his way out to the platform, looked at himself in it.

Why, no wonder he had glanced at him that way! His face was ghastly white, almost livid. Impossible! He didn't feel *that* bad! It must be these arc-lights in here that gave one that pallor. The queasiness in his stomach was increasing momentarily. That old housekeeper of mine has given me a bad attack of indigestion, he thought accusingly. I only hope it doesn't become acute.

He wondered if there would be time to drink a bromo at the station buffet to settle his stomach. He glanced up at the clock. No, the next train left in two minutes, he'd have to get right on. The one he should have taken had left ten minutes before.

When he had reached it, he sank back on one of the straw-lined seats in the second-class coach with a low moan of relief. Luckily there was no one else in the compartment with him. He hated people around him when he didn't feel well. The train was moving, and that only made him feel worse. He threw his head back against the seat and let it roll limply with the motion of the train. His cane fell over and he left it there.

His hands went to his throat, dragged the knot of his tie aside, plucked open his collar. Nothing seemed to give him any relief. He tried opening the window, to let some fresh air in. A lot of cinders and nauseating coal gas came in instead. He only felt worse, but he was unable to summon the strength to close it again.

Suddenly a knife seemed to go through his middle. It was so sharp, so unexpected, subconsciously he even looked down to see if perhaps his bag hadn't opened and he had injured himself in some way on the protruding edge of what it held.

The agony came again in a minute or two, and then again. Each time deeper, more slashing. Sweat was standing out on his forehead now. The train had already stopped twice, gone on again. His sight would dim momentarily, then clear again. The knife-pains had become so incessant now they merged into one long drawn-out probing.

"I must fight this off — until after. I must finish that job first. Then I can become ill to my heart's content. I have never yet failed in my duty. My father never did, nor his father before him." He struggled to his feet, reeled against the compartment door, threw it open.

He had to hang on to the frame with both hands to keep from going down. The midsection of his body kept trying to fold over like a clothespin. He stiffened his back against it. The "drawing" was excruciating but he counteracted it, held straight. "Conductor!" he called hoarsely above the clacking of the wheels. "Conductor, hurry!"

The conductor came into sight at the upper end of the passageway, showed instant concern at sight of his twisted, agonized face. He ran down to him. "What's the matter, sir?"

"Will you see that I get off this train at R——? Will you make sure that I do? I am slightly ill."

"That's the next station, we get there in five minutes. You'd better let me have the station master call an ambulance."

"No, no, no. Nothing must hinder me." He raised his head with anguished pride of office. "I am 'Mister Paris' and I have an appointment that must be kept. Just give me your arm and make sure that I get down from the train, that's all. I'll see to the rest. The prison is right opposite the station. And my bag — don't let me leave my bag behind."

The conductor's eyes had dilated at the revelation of who he was. "But, sir, you're in a state of collapse. There's froth at your mouth! You'd better have immediate attention."

"Just get me off at R——. I'm late now. Should have been on the train before this," was the almost inaudible answer. "My duty comes first."

The train began to slow. The conductor put an arm around his waist, threw open the outside door of the compartment, helped him down the step. His hand flexed graspingly at his side, and the conductor put the black bag into it.

"But at least let someone assist you to get over there."

"No, no, no. The tradition is that Mister Paris comes in alone. The gate opens for him and him alone. I will not create a scene at such a time, bring discredit on what I stand for. I am the law of France."

The train was starting on its way again behind him. He stood there teetering, leaning first forward, then backward, threatening to fall against the line of cars picking up speed behind him, and be flung down.

The pain was suddenly, abruptly, gone, leaving a lack of any sensation whatever in its wake. A numbness was starting to spread over him. He could feel his toes and fingers beginning to cool.

"I will get there," he murmured, "I must. This momentary reprieve will see me through." He put one foot before him, followed it with the other. Stiffly, with unflexed joints, like an automaton threatening to topple at every step, he moved through the little suburban wayside station, out into the cobbled square beyond. Facing him across it were the green-gray prison buildings, outlined in the first glimmer of the dawn.

His leg suddenly went down under him and he stumbled to one knee. He had gone over the curb without feeling it. He had no more sensation in his feet to tell by. He picked himself up again, swayed, forced himself on. His hand rose to his neck, fumbled numbly to close his disarrayed collar. It went up too high, he couldn't guide it any more; it touched the side of his head first, then he brought it down to the right level, closed the gap in his collar. Since he couldn't work the buttonhole, it only opened again.

They were making a lot of noise in there, shouting, calling out. "Down! Down!" A little knot of curiosity

mongers was huddled about the great gate before him, looking in. Someone turned and saw him, and they parted before him in silent awe, fell back, leaving a lane through their midst for him to pass in by.

A sudden hush fell, and through the crevice of the guillotine Lamont saw the gates slowly widen and a figure, erect, rigid, coming inexorably forward in the uncertain dawn-light.

"She's let me down! She's failed!" And suddenly fear flooded through him and he all but crumpled where he stood.

The executioner had reached the foot of the platform now. But something was the matter. They were running toward him to assist him.

"She got to him after all! He's groggy, he's floundering, he'll never make those twenty steps," Lamont shouted to himself. He couldn't see him for a minute, the edge of the platform intervened. Had he fallen, had he expired? Then there was a creak, and with the slowness of a deep-sea diver emerging from the water, the head of the executioner rose above the platform edge, assisted upward by two of them.

The man with the red carnation handed over the black bag. "Affix the blade." He stood there now on the platform. He motioned them to take their hands from him. His gaze rested dimly on Lamont. "I apologize, *m'sieu*," he murmured, "for making you wait like this."

Lamont could not answer. He only stared horribly.

They had inserted the blade in the sluice. The pulleys were worked in reverse, and it rose slowly to the top, like quicksilver in a thermometer.

"Prepare the subject."

The executioner's hand groped for Lamont's shoulder. He had no strength left even to bear down, press him to his knees. It was done for him.

Wild, fierce hope wells through Lamont. "He'll never make it. He can't even see straight any more. His eyes are dimming!"

A husky whisper sounded from him, meant for Lamont, although he couldn't distinguish him any more, didn't know where to direct it. "Have courage. You will not feel it." The dead consoling the dying!

The upper half of the wooden collar was fitted down on Lamont's neck. The basket was shifted forward under his face. "A minute more," Lamont kept saying to himself. "A minute more. A minute more, and I win! He's starting to fall. There he goes, there he goes over! I wi —!"

He shouted it aloud. The executioner flailed downward face foremost. His hands, extended spasmodically in the direction of the instrument as he went over, swept curvingly past, caught on the lever that released the counterweight, seized it, dragged it down with them.

"I wi — !" The weight shot up, the knife flashed down and cut the word in two.

Two dead men lay side by side on the platform.

Last year we invited Margery Allingham to enter EQMM's Second Annual Contest which closed October 20, 1946. Miss Allingham replied as follows: "Dear Ellery Queen: Many thanks for your cordial note and the details of the competition. I wish I could say I was planning to enter a story but alas, I am so late with 'promised' work that I dare not even hope to take a shot at the magnificent target this year. All good wishes for the continued success of EQMM which is a joy."

Well, that was a disappointment, but we thank Miss Allingham sincerely for her praise of EQMM. As it turned out, however, the disappointment was restricted only to Margery Allingham's participation in our Second Annual Contest. While the creator of Mr. Albert Campion was unable to take out enough time to write a brand-new 5,000-to-10,000-word story, she apparently was able to slice in a brand-new short-short about the lean amateur in the horn-rimmed spectacles — for shortly after we received Miss Allingham's regrets, we also received from her literary agent the manuscript of "Mr. Campion's Lucky Day."

So, be patient, dear readers. EQMM's Third Annual Contest is now officially on — it will close October 20, 1947. Again we invite Miss Allingham to enter her famous Mr. Campion, and we hope this year she will be able "to take a shot" at it. In the meantime take pleasure in the newest adventure of Mr. Campion in which that distinguished amateur, who is not a betting man, brings home a criminological long shot at 50-to-1 odds. . . .

MR. CAMPION'S LUCKY DAY

by MARGERY ALLINGHAM

WHEN Mr. Albert Campion, the distinguished amateur, arrived happily at the luxury flat, Superintendent Stanislaus Oates, who had summoned him, had just reached the unnerving conclusion that Chippy Figg was not after all guilty of the murder of the man in the sitting room.

Chippy, who was fidgeting in the kitchenette, his peaky face yellow with anxiety, had been saying so for some time.

"I was with me Auntie all the evening, turning 'er mangle all the blessed evening," he was protesting, as Campion, an ineffable glow of well-being about him, appeared in the doorway. "Auntie'll swear to it."

"I don't doubt it, my lad, but what is more important is that Constable Richards of the W Division, who lives next door to your Aunt and who overlooks her lighted kitchen from his back door, is able to confirm her."

Oates did not add "unfortunately"

but the word hung unspoken in the tiny room. In the silence he turned and caught sight of the slender newcomer in the horn-rimmed spectacles. "Oh, hallo, Campion. Glad to see you. Come over here, will you? There's nothing to grin about, let me tell you." Taking his old friend by the elbow he pushed him firmly across the wide passage, now crowded with officials, to the sitting room. As the door of the apartment closed behind them his exasperation boiled over.

"Ten minutes ago I had a pretty little open-and-shut case to show you, yet the moment you come beaming into it it turns into a minor miracle."

The smile had vanished from Mr. Campion's face as his eyes took in the scene and now he stood looking down at the heavy figure of a middle-aged man, bald and running badly to fat, which sprawled over the desk before the curtained window.

"Nothing exactly decorative about this," he observed grimly. "Shot?"

"Yes. From the doorway. Death instantaneous. He's the owner of the flat and lived alone here."

"I see. Our friend in the purple suit didn't do it?"

"Chippy? No. Couldn't have. That's the devil of it. Look Campion, consider this. It's now midnight. Two hours ago we were called in by a doctor who lives in the apartment above this one. He —"

Mr. Campion coughed. "Introduce me to the corpse."

"Well —" Oates hesitated, "— his name was Fane and he wasn't pleasant. He made money on the turf and more in ways less orthodox."

" 'Blacking' merchant?"

"No evidence to date but considerable suspicion."

"Dear me," said Mr. Campion mildly. "Continue with the doctor."

"He phoned at ten and his story is quite straightforward. He knew Fane slightly and came in here at a quarter to six to give him a draught for a violent headache. Fane refused to go to bed because he was expecting Figg. The doctor left in time to reach a cocktail party some distance away at six."

"Did the doctor know Figg?"

"Slightly. The whole block did. He's a colorful figure who always called on Fane on Thursday nights. Fane called him his tipster but I think we shall find he did a little street betting, Fane financing. The dead man had many small irons in the fire."

"Any more on Figg?"

"A little. Last week the two quarrelled violently and were heard all over the building. Tonight, while the doctor was at the Eclipse Sporting Club, he received a mysterious message on the phone from an uneducated voice telling him to go to Fane quickly. He hurried back to find this door on the latch and Fane lying as you see him, still warm, the radio going full blast."

Campion eyed the set. "Powerful?" he enquired.

"Terrific. The couple below say it

was roaring from ten minutes to six until the doctor turned it off after he found Fane. No one could have noticed the shot above the row."

"Depressing neighbor. Anyone see anything?"

"No. The porter says he saw no visitors, but he's been in and out of the hall and might have missed anyone. It seems certain that Figg had slipped by him but, as you heard, his alibi is perfect. He lives a long way from here."

"Lucky chap. Can I see the doctor?"

"If you must, but you're wasting your time. I've taken him through his statement very carefully. He's still here though if you want him."

Campion said nothing and was still silent when the doctor came bustling in a few minutes later. He was a round-faced hearty little man with quick brown eyes and still excited.

"I admit I did not know him well," he said, waving at the dead man, "but it was a shock, you know. Poor fellow, he was still warm when I found him but there wasn't a hope."

"No," said Campion, "not with a bullet through his heart. Tell me, Doctor, have you a large practice?"

"None at all. I've retired." The man seemed put out. "I thought I made that clear. No, a G.P.'s life is too arduous for me, I'm afraid. I want to enjoy my life, not to tear it out. I gave up medicine some six years ago. But I mustn't bore you about myself. Did you get hold of Figg, Superintendent?"

"Yes, but the fellow has a complete alibi." Mr. Campion made the statement baldly, ignoring Oates's scandalized frown.

"An alibi? But I could have sworn I—" The doctor bit back the words but Oates seized on them.

"You were going to say you recognized his voice on the phone?"

"No, no, I can't be as explicit as that, but I must admit that at the time I thought that the voice resembled — Good heavens, sir!"

The final exclamation was addressed to Campion who had suddenly moved forward and, exerting all his strength, had pulled the body up off the writing table across which it sprawled. The sight was terrible. The entire corpse moved in one solid mass, the knees remaining bent, the head thrust out stiffly from the shoulders.

"Rigor very well advanced," muttered Mr. Campion.

"Good lord, yes. Much more so than I had expected." The doctor's round eyes had widened. "It does happen, of course. I've known it to be instantaneous. Cadaveric spasm, we call it. In this case —"

He got no further. The lean figure in the horn-rimmed spectacles had let the body drop. It heeled over, grotesquely horrible. Campion ignored it. He was studying a sheet of figures which had been hidden under the dead man's face. When he looked up his eyes were hard.

"How much did you owe him, Doctor?" he enquired softly. "He was putting on the pressure, I sup-

pose? What did you do with the revolver? Leave it at your club?"

"This is a monstrous accusation, sir. My solicitor —"

"Really, Campion, if you've no proof . . ." Oates began nervously.

Campion's voice silenced him. "Fane probably deserved shooting," he said, "and I could almost have forgiven you, Doctor, if you hadn't tried to involve poor wretched little Chippy. However, Fane has got you. You may have shot him but he'll hang you — with this."

He held the paper out to Oates, who snatched it. The doctor stared at it over his arm.

"It's only a list of his day's winnings," he said angrily. "There's no proof of anything here."

Campion's thin forefinger pointed to a single item.

4.30 Iron Ore won 6–4 £133–6–8.

Oates raised worried eyes. "I don't get it," he said.

"Iron Ore didn't win," said Mr. Campion. "It passed the post first and was credited with a win in the afternoon editions, but there was a spot of bumping and the appeal was allowed. That was announced on the six o'clock news. If Fane was sitting here with the radio going at six o'clock he could hardly have missed it unless —"

"Unless?"

"Unless he was dead by then. The doctor says himself he saw him at ten minutes to six — Quick, Oates!"

He sprang after the flying figure of the doctor, who eluded him only to crash into a couple of constables in the vestibule.

In the excitement, which was considerable, the kitchenette was deserted and Mr. Figg, ever an opportunist, quietly took his leave.

It was some hours before a full check of all details, including the bogus telephone message to the doctor's club, had been made, and it was dawn when the weary Superintendent looked round for Mr. Campion. He found him sleeping peacefully in the bedroom with such a beatific smile on his face that Oates took peculiar pleasure in waking him.

"How did you do that?" he demanded when at last they were in a taxi together.

Campion yawned.

"Doctor's evidence," he said. "What man with a violent headache sits by a blaring radio? Besides, a cadaveric spasm is instantaneous. The doctor did not notice it when he found the body, therefore it was ordinary rigor which takes some hours to develop."

Oates laughed. "Fair enough, but I still call it luck," he said. "You just happened to know the details of that race. It's your lucky day."

Mr. Campion's smile broadened.

"I couldn't agree with you more," he murmured. "I had a tenner on the second horse. That was how I knew."

Oates grunted. "Long odds?"

"Fifty to one."

"Good lord, what's its name?"

"Amateur," whispered Mr. Campion. "That was why I came to back it. I'm not a betting man."

It is always an intoxicating pleasure to come upon a "new" detective story by Michael Arlen, "explorer in Mayfair" and author of the immensely successful THE GREEN HAT *(ah, those dear dead days!). In the tale so sardonically titled "Fool-Proof," Mr. Arlen gives us what is commonly called "the straight detective story" — yeah, straight as a corkscrew! The man who wrote* THESE CHARMING PEOPLE *tells us the story of a charming English governess, an even more charming English widower, a still more charming English step-daughter, and a Chief-Inspector of Scotland Yard who, if not exactly charming, is certainly ingratiating.*

Ah, these charming people . . . Bennett Cerf once related how Michael Arlen was sitting with Dorothy Kilgallen, the well-known columnist and radio-breakfasteer, in the Colony Restaurant in New York; how Dorothy Kilgallen asked "Mike" why he hadn't written a novel for so long a time; and how Mr. Arlen replied: "You know those charming people I used to write about? I can't stand them any more!"

FOOL-PROOF

by MICHAEL ARLEN

MISS LIVERMORE was very soon comfortably settled at the small hotel in Cannes to which she had been recommended by friends in England.

The guests at the *Hôtel des Fleurs* were for the most part elderly English and American couples, who returned year by year. The establishment was conducted on very reasonable family lines, so to stay there was no strain on the purses of gentlefolk of modest means. A pleasant garden and a superb view over the bay of Cannes added to its amenities.

Her physician had ordered Miss Livermore to the South of France for a prolonged rest. Recently her nerves and normally sound constitution had been profoundly affected by a tragic event. This was nothing less than the accidental death of a little girl of ten, who was in her charge at that time.

Miss Livermore was a governess. The household of Lord and Lady Childhood had been awakened by a piercing cry in the middle of the night to find the fair-haired, slender child lying with a broken neck at the foot of the great stone stairway leading to the hall. Hitherto no one had suspected Doris of walking in her sleep, but there could be no question but that sleep-walking had caused the tragedy.

Ada Livermore, who was notably devoted to her pretty and talented charge, was unable to rid herself of a

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sense of guilt. She repeatedly told the afflicted parents that the child's movements in the very next room should have awakened her, and that she would never forgive herself her negligence.

There was nothing Lord and Lady Childhood could do to comfort the conscientious governess. Indeed, Miss Livermore's almost hysterical grief had the effect of accentuating their own sense of loss, so that it was with relief that they saw the governess leave their employment for her rest-cure on the Riviera.

Ada Livermore was a presentable young woman of thirty-three. She was a blonde, but in the sense in which that word is understood on the playing-fields of Girton rather than in Hollywood. She was tall and athletic, what is called a "very English type." She made friends easily, and exchanged letters generously with those whom she did not frequently see.

It is curious to note here that, but for Miss Livermore's habit of copious letter-writing about her fellow guests at the *Hôtel des Fleurs*, the recent sensational trial at the Old Bailey might not have taken place.

Miss Livermore had not been a guest at the hotel for more than a week before it was obvious that an elderly gentleman called Mr. Wilding was finding a great deal of pleasure in her companionship.

This Mr. Wilding was also a newcomer to the *Hôtel des Fleurs*, having arrived there for his first visit a few days after Miss Livermore. He was a widower with a daughter of fourteen or so, an attractive but excessively noisy girl who was something of a trial in the hotel.

Mr. Wilding was a lean, gray-haired gentleman with something of the quiet distinction of a diplomat. It was said that he was the retired senior partner of a respectable firm of provincial lawyers.

Thus it was not surprising that his courtship of Miss Livermore — since any lower pursuit was unthinkable in connection with such respectable people — was followed with profound interest by the other guests at the *Hôtel des Fleurs*.

The extraordinary series of events which had the result of giving the unfortunate *Hôtel des Fleurs* a gruesome and world-wide notoriety was set in train by a letter written by Ada Livermore to her brother.

Young John Livermore was connected with the police, but only in the most obscure and humdrum fashion as a clerk in the Accounts Department at Scotland Yard. Thus he knew no more about the detection of crime or the pursuit of criminals than a bank-clerk with an appetite for Edgar Wallace might know, and his life was just as unexciting.

His sister's letter from the South of France, after the usual amiable gossip which is of no interest to us, went on to say that she had met a most agreeable gentleman called Mr. Wilding.

"What has drawn us together" (wrote Ada) "is that he, like me, has

recently suffered a tragic loss. And the similarity is the more acute because, no matter what kind friends may say, we both cannot help blaming ourselves for the accidents which have deprived us of those who are dear to us.

"Poor Mr. Wilding's wife lost her life about a year ago in a fire which completely gutted his country house near Market Harborough. Mr. Wilding was in the house at the very time, sitting up late over some business papers in his library downstairs. But the fire started in the east wing of the house, whereas he was sitting absorbed on the far side of the west wing.

"He had just started from his chair, smelling what seemed to be something burning, when his manservant, still in night attire, ran in with the frightful news that fire was demolishing the east wing of the house and that Mrs. Wilding was trapped in her room.

"They were quite unable to reach her through the flames, and the rest of the household only just managed to leave the house in time. One cannot help feeling the utmost sympathy for Mr. Wilding, though it is no doubt true that he — like most other people, and myself in particular — tends to exaggerate his sense of guilt, for he continues to blame himself bitterly for having been too absorbed in his business papers to become aware in time of the progress of the fire. . . ."

And so on.

Now it happened that John Livermore, in the course of conversation with a friend who knew his sister, spoke of this fire, giving the details as a matter of interest. In due course this friend in his turn happened to mention it to some relative living in Market Harborough, no doubt asking them if they had known the unfortunate Mrs. Wilding, and so on.

To his astonishment he was told that no such accident had happened to a country house within forty miles of Market Harborough for at least ten years: that quite decidedly there had been no such considerable fire at any house within the last year or so: and that there was no Mr. and Mrs. Wilding among the landed gentry thereabouts.

This was such a facer that the friend, with a good deal of amusement, passed on to John Livermore what he had heard, adding that "dear old Ada," in spite of having been a governess, would shortly be needing a governess herself to save her from being victimized by unscrupulous though possibly handsome widowers.

John Livermore found himself in a dilemma, and a very natural one in the circumstances. For Ada was by more than ten years his elder sister, and — easy-going though she usually was — had always exercised a certain authority over him. So he was reluctant to write and tell her that her friend "Mr. Wilding" was nothing better than a liar, and a mean, sneaky liar too, with his stories of "property" near Market Harborough and "poor dead wife," and so on.

On the other hand, poor John felt

it must be his duty to give her some form of warning. For suppose this plausible fellow was one of those confidence tricksters, or — worse still — suppose he was one of those notorious adventurers who marry a series of unworldly women, steal their modest savings, and desert them.

Confronted by this dilemma, young Livermore took the bold step of asking advice from the least formidable — in appearance, that is — of the detectives of the Criminal Investigation Department. He had to loiter a few days up and down the passages of the C.I.D. — for he worked in the same building — before being able to catch sight of Chief-Inspector Parbold sitting alone in his room.

Mr. Parbold was a kindly man, frequently remembering his own timidity when climbing the first rungs of the ladder. So he did not dismiss the story of the so-called Mr. Wilding as a fanciful trifle, but listened with attention.

"Now, my lad," he said at last, "it's odds on that there is nothing in this at all. It's highly probable, of course, that this Mr. Wilding likes to exercise his imagination — but there is nothing criminal in telling a few fibs, and smart places like Cannes and Deauville and so on occasionally have pretty queer people among their visitors.

"At the same time, he *may* be up to something, and so it might be as well to keep a sort of eye on him. So I suggest, young Livermore, that in your next letter to your sister you say nothing at all about your discovery — just write the kind of letter you usually do. But ask her to send you some snapshots. There is just a possibility that there may be one of this Mr. Wilding among them — but if not, we can try something else."

"Nothing could be easier," said John with relief, "for Ada is always sending snapshots from here and there, but she hasn't as yet sent any from Cannes."

Thus it was with a good deal of excitement that he awaited and opened Ada's reply to his letter. There were six small snapshots in all, and she explained that some had been taken while on the beach and others when a party from the hotel had gone for a drive to the lovely little hill-town of St. Paul.

In two of the snapshots Ada herself figured alone, and very nice and attractive she looked in her bathing suit. The others were of groups of four and five, and in two of these groups there was a bare-headed, lean, grey-haired gentleman with a long-legged young girl beside him.

Chief-Inspector Parbold, when John showed him the snapshots, spent quite ten minutes examining them through a powerful glass, concentrating particularly on those in which Mr. and Miss Wilding figured. Then, with a thoughtful look, he handed all but one back to the young man.

"Well, my lad," he said, "I can't *quite* tell you to put your mind at rest."

"You mean," cried John with ex-

citement, "that you recognize him, sir?"

Chief-Inspector Parbold looked preoccupied. "Well, not quite — that's the trouble. The chap's face is familiar — or seems to be. I shall ask you to let me keep this snapshot of him and his daughter if I may."

He interrupted himself to smile at the look of fearful excitement on the young man's face. "Now don't," he continued, "run away with any fanciful ideas about this Wilding having any criminal designs on your sister — who, by the way, looks a very attractive and charming young woman. I can't quite understand your being concerned for her. She's lucky to afford holidaying about in places like Cannes."

"Oh, but she can't!" John cried quickly, and as the Chief-Inspector did not appear to be pressed for time, he told him something about Ada and how it was that she happened to be in Cannes for a protracted rest.

"But what shall I do?" he added excitedly. "Surely Ada should be warned, or something. What do you advise, sir?"

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said the Chief-Inspector. "I am due for my holiday in a few days' time, and as you say this hotel in Cannes is so cheap — well, I'll just take my couple of weeks or so down there. Now don't you worry your head with gory detective stories, young man. If this Wilding chap is up to any tricks, I'll soon send him to the rightabout. But mind you don't write your sister anything at all about this — for one thing you will only scare her, maybe quite unnecessarily, and for another — well, he might get wind of my coming and clear out."

Now what, as appeared later at the Old Bailey, had decided Chief-Inspector Parbold to visit the *Hôtel des Fleurs* on his holiday was a fact about which he had given young Livermore no hint. This was that the face of the so-called "Mr. Wilding" was in no way familiar to him — but that, by a curious trick of memory, he had recognized in "Miss Wilding" a young provincial actress who had recently made something of a hit in a "schoolgirl" part, though in an unsuccessful play.

What could she be doing as this "Mr. Wilding's" partner?

What could be the nature of the "plot" — against Miss Livermore or any stranger — in which so young a girl could have her part to play?

In the meanwhile Miss Livermore was finding her stay in Cannes agreeable beyond her expectations. There was always pleasant, gossipy company to be found within the *Hôtel des Fleurs*, while for walks and drives down to the beach there was the quiet companionship of Mr. Wilding. He had hired a small Ford car, which Ada, who enjoyed driving, drove more frequently than he.

Ada could not but admit to herself that her feelings towards the elderly but distinguished-looking widower were daily increasing in warmth. Nor could she honestly deny that his

thoughtful attentiveness towards her must be inspired by a feeling of really deep sympathy.

Then one day Mr. Wilding told her that which, while depriving her of her scarcely formed hopes of marrying him, redoubled her affection and admiration for him. It appeared that his daughter Ellen was really his stepdaughter, being his wife's child by a previous marriage to a very rich man who had been killed in a hunting accident.

Mrs. Wilding's tragic death had, therefore, placed a very grave responsibility on the girl's stepfather. For by the late Mrs. Wilding's will the fortune bequeathed to her by her first husband, which even after the payment of onerous duties amounted to half a million pounds, came in its entirety to her only child.

Mr. Wilding's responsibility was that he had been appointed the trustee of this fortune until the girl's twenty-first birthday, after which he would be expected to exercise no more than a reasonable supervision. He confessed to Ada that, though no more than a year had passed since his wife's death, his trusteeship had already caused him the gravest concern.

For Ellen, despite her robust looks, was not really strong, easily given to contracting severe colds, chills and so on. No more than three months ago she had run a temperature of over a hundred and three during a severe attack of influenza. And since the girl's fortune, should anything happen to her, must come to him by the terms of his wife's will, Mr. Wilding confessed to Ada that while the poor girl lay so seriously ill, he found himself praying on his knees that his thoughts should not be soiled by any expectation of benefit.

Ada's sympathies, as she wrote to her brother — who immediately forwarded the letter to Chief-Inspector Parbold at Cannes — were warmly aroused by his lack of resentment towards the terms of his late wife's will. It appeared that Mr. Wilding himself, though at one time of substantial means, was now quite a poor man owing to unfortunate investments. Thus the small sum he was paid as his stepchild's trustee was far from negligible to him. But in spite of the fact that he would be deprived of both this and his trusteeship if he remarried before Ellen's twenty-first birthday, his late wife's selfishness could draw from him only the comment that she had been the victim of an unusually possessive nature.

At this Ada — who, as her brother well knew, could at times be unusually outspoken — told him quite frankly that the opinion of all fair and reasonable people must be that the late Mrs. Wilding had behaved not at all well towards him. It was not so much the unfair disposition of her fortune, she pointed out, which must inspire this opinion, but the apparent lack of confidence in one for whom she should have had the utmost respect.

Now Chief-Inspector Parbold was kept in touch with these developments both through John Livermore's

letters from London and by his own observations on the spot. Staying at the *Hôtel des Fleurs* under the amiable pseudonym of "Mr. Maple," he had lost no time in making the acquaintance of the other guests, among whom, of course, were Miss Livermore and the two so-called Wildings.

His suspicions about "Miss Wilding" were immediately confirmed by the fact that she went out of her way, by excessive noisiness and rompings, to emphasize her age as about fourteen. The detective judged that she must be at least seventeen, and a very talented young actress at that.

The Chief-Inspector's interest in the "Wilding" conspiracy was increased by young John Livermore's letters from London. The matter of these letters made it plain that there *was* a conspiracy on foot. The story of "Wilding's" trusteeship, the wealthy stepchild, the selfish will, the stepfather's inability to marry without losing money — this string of lies had all the marks of a plot very carefully evolved. But to what end, for what purpose?

It seemed unreasonable to suppose that so elegant a trickster should have gone to such trouble merely to marry an attractive ex-governess for her savings — even though these amounted, so John had told him, to a quite respectable sum. On the other hand, if his aim *was* marriage and subsequent robbery, why should he tell that string of lies about being *unable* to marry without losing money by it?

In the meanwhile the Chief-Inspector, or rather "Mr. Maple," found himself both liking and being sorry for Ada. She was so obviously impressed by the distinguished-looking "widower." She was so plainly flattered — though she did her best not to show this — by his respectful attentions. In fact, she had fallen for the blighter, as Parbold expressed it to himself, like a ton of bricks.

So it was no wonder that after he had been there a week his indignation at the hoax that was being played on Miss Livermore had increased to a pitch at which he could scarcely wait to give "Mr. and Miss Wilding" a real good piece of his mind for so deceiving a young lady who really fancied herself "in love."

His resentment was a little appeased by a conversation he had in secret with Inspector Gaillard, of the Cannes Préfecture of Police, to whom he had introduced himself in his real capacity. Inspector Gaillard offered to summon Wilding to the Préfecture to show his passport, to find out whether it was a forged one or not, and if it was, to have him immediately expelled.

Parbold told him he would prefer to await further developments, adding that he would be grateful if Inspector Gaillard and his men would hold themselves in readiness to act on any information which he, Parbold, might gather.

However, the conspiracy was moving towards its climax much more quickly than Chief-Inspector Parbold suspected. And it was actually he who, unwittingly, brought this climax about.

John Livermore wrote him again from London, enclosing a letter he had just received from his sister. Ada had written to her brother, obviously in very great distress of mind, that Mr. Wilding had done her the very great honor of asking her to be his wife.

He had told Ada that he would gladly sacrifice his present income and onerous trusteeship, and that he could with very little difficulty secure adequate employment in London, if he could rely on her companionship as his wife. Ada wrote distressfully that she had brought herself to refuse him, though in all her life she had never met a man she liked and respected so deeply. But it would be cruel to expect a man of his age to start working again for what could be no more than a bare living, and so she could not permit him to sacrifice himself.

Parbold pondered long over this letter. At last he had something definite to work on — a proposal of marriage. This "Wilding" was undoubtedly an unusually clever crook. The detective could see how a woman like Miss Livermore would in the end give way to a proposal of marriage couched in such unselfish terms. She would refuse him a few times, and then marry him. Then he, once married on the unselfish basis of having sacrificed his own income, would find it as easy as pie to persuade Ada to entrust him with her savings, which John Livermore had estimated at about five or six hundred pounds.

Chief-Inspector Parbold now clearly saw the reason for the complicated plot of the stepchild, the unfair will, and so on. It was almost fool-proof where such a fair-minded, unworldly woman as Ada Livermore was concerned. The detective estimated that "Mr. and Miss Wilding's" expenditure at the modest *Hôtel des Fleurs* could amount to no more than a fraction of the five or six hundred pounds they stood to win. Thus the precious pair would be clear gainers by about four hundred pounds for six weeks' not very hard work.

He decided to act immediately. There was no question of arrest, of course. Nothing criminal had yet been done. But he fancied that a word or two privately with the "Wildings" would suffice to get them out of Cannes as quickly as the fastest airplane would take them.

It was this very "word or two" which led to such astonishing developments.

The Chief-Inspector saw the man that very morning sauntering in the garden with Ada. Drawing him away with a brief excuse, he wasted no time in beating about the bush.

" 'Mr. Wilding' — or whatever your name is — let me give you a word of warning. It would be healthy for you and for your so-called stepdaughter to leave Cannes today. Let me make myself quite clear — I am not asking you — I am *telling* you."

These words did not make quite that impression on the man that Parbold had hoped for. Wilding smiled faintly.

"I recognized you, Chief-Inspector, the moment I set eyes on you. May I ask if you are actually making any charge against me and my so-called stepdaughter? If so, I should like to hear it."

"That tone will get you nowhere, Wilding. No, there is no charge *here*. Though I dare say I could make some charges against you if you ever come my way in England — bigamy and desertion, for example. I happen to know you are trying to marry Miss Livermore under false pretences. So I am merely warning you to get out for the good of your health — and to stay out."

Wilding threw a thoughtful glance across the garden at Miss Livermore's tall, athletic figure. Ada looked very fair and English as she stood talking in her pedantic "governess" French to an elderly French couple. Parbold could almost feel the man regretting having to give up both such a pleasant "wife" and such a tidy little sum of money. He was a cool customer, all right.

"Make up your mind," he said sharply.

"I have," Wilding assured him with the utmost calmness. "In fact, I had some days ago made up my mind to leave Cannes — temporarily, of course. Miss Livermore will verify this if you care to ask her. I shall leave for Marseilles this afternoon ——"

Astounded, Parbold said, "You mean you were going anyway?"

Wilding smiled ruefully. "I was intending to leave only temporarily, Chief-Inspector, for I really have some important business in Marseilles — but if you had not put your oar in I should have been back here in a couple of days. As things stand, however, I shan't come back, and Ellen — who had really grown quite attached to the young lady — can join me in a few days' time. This will make everything seem less abrupt to Miss Livermore, and I fancy hurt her feelings less — as you seem to be so sensitive about them."

At this moment Ada herself came towards them, saying, "And what are you two men conspiring about on so lovely a morning?"

The Chief-Inspector could not but admire Wilding as a cool customer as he answered pleasantly, "I was just telling Mr. Maple that you, Ellen and I had arranged to go for a bathing picnic tomorrow to that pleasant little bay near La Napoule. But I am afraid you and Ellen must go by yourselves, my dear Ada, for ——"

Ada looked quite vexed. "I think it's too bad your going away just now, even for a few days. And just when we had arranged that nice little trip tomorrow — and I was so looking forward to teaching both you and Ellen how to do the 'crawl' stroke!"

"Oh, there'll be time enough for that later, Ada — and I dare say when I get back from Marseilles I shall find Ellen as accomplished a swimmer as you." Wilding then pleasantly included the Chief-Inspector in the conversation by adding, "This little bay they are going to, so Miss Livermore

tells me, is a most charming, secluded little place with a really nice beach for poor swimmers, as the shallow water extends for hundreds of yards. You should make a point of visiting it before you leave Cannes, Mr. Maple."

Later on Chief-Inspector Parbold was to kick himself for not having "spotted" the point of the conspiracy then and there. But at the time he felt he had done quite a good job in having warned an unscrupulous adventurer off the field, for when he saw "Mr. Wilding" leave the hotel that afternoon with his bags, he was reasonably certain that Miss Livermore would never see her handsome "widower" again and that his "dear little Ellen" would shortly follow him — no doubt to victimize gullible women in places far from Cannes. He only hoped he might have a chance some time to lay his hands on the pair at their tricks in England.

But the next morning did not find him in such an easy frame of mind. It seemed to him that he had managed to get rid of a really clever crook altogether too easily. Besides, wasn't there something suspicious about the girl being left behind as a "companion" for Miss Livermore? Companion my eye!

Then as he sat brooding over his rolls and coffee it suddenly came to him as a real shock that he had no guarantee whatsoever that Wilding had left Cannes at all. He might merely have moved to another hotel. And then this all-day picnic . . .

What a juggins he had been! What could be simpler than for Wilding to pick up Ada and Ellen at the little bay up the coast, motor to some small town, maybe even as far as Toulon or Marseilles, and get married before a British Consul? Trust a cool customer like Wilding to have all papers, both his and hers, in order.

It was galling to the Chief-Inspector's vanity that these thoughts should have come to him too late, for it was now past eleven o'clock. The hall-porter told him that Miss Livermore and Miss Wilding had left a full hour ago in the Ford, complete with picnic basket and bathing things.

The Chief-Inspector grimly asked him to call a taxi immediately. He would drive up the coast past La Napoule until he came upon them, and if Wilding was there he would give him the surprise of his precious life.

He was astounded when the hall-porter, before telephoning for the taxi, handed him a note addressed to "Mr. Maple," saying it had come by hand only a few minutes before. Tearing it open, he was certain it must come from Inspector Gaillard. But it was unsigned.

You are urged to hire a car and drive immediately towards Trayas up the coast. Your driver will know the way. You are advised to call first at the Préfecture and bring with you a French police official. Keep your eyes open for a Hôtel L'Aubras, *which is closed and shuttered. Draw up your car one hundred yards farther on. Then take the footpath lead-*

ing to the left, and see no one spots you from the beach below. Hurry.

That was all. But the Chief-Inspector wasted no time in wondering over this mysterious document. He immediately telephoned to Inspector Gaillard to say he would pick him up as soon as possible. Then, having done so ten minutes later, he explained the "Wilding" conspiracy to the Frenchman up to date, and showed him the note.

"But can this come from Miss Livermore?" Gaillard asked, frowning.

"Impossible, I should say. No, there's someone else in this case we don't yet know of who must have been watching me as I've been watching Wilding. But we can only wonder what the devil it all means until we get to this place."

The driver of the car, directed by Inspector Gaillard, drew up to the left of the road past the deserted *Hôtel L'Aubras*. Rich red rocks form the coast line at this part. The happy contrast between this rich, satisfying color and the deep blue of the sea under the June sun would have entranced Chief-Inspector Parbold at any other time.

A tiny bay was about twenty yards below them, but the beach was entirely screened from the road on which they stood by a line of bushes. Some twenty-five yards to their right, on a jagged red rock forming one arm of the tiny bay, stood a shuttered and obviously unoccupied villa. There was no sign of life anywhere, except a passing car or so on the road.

"By the end of July," Gaillard whispered, "this place is crowded with all nationalities, but the season has not yet begun."

Parbold led the way up the footpath mentioned in the mysterious note. Ten yards farther on they came to a small break in the bushes, and could look down on the beach immediately below them without being seen.

Kneeling, they peered down and saw Miss Livermore and Ellen Wilding. The strip of beach was paved with smooth pebbles. The sea was shallow and very clear. The police officers could see the smooth rocks below the surface for quite a way out.

The two women below were in the water up to their knees, and Ellen's laughter was clearly audible.

"But where," Gaillard whispered, "is our friend Wilding?"

"We've just got to wait," Parbold whispered back. "And I'm just getting an idea what we're waiting for, too. My view is that Wilding is hidden somewhere behind one of those red rocks on the beach. And then ——"

"On the contrary," a voice behind them said just audibly, "he is hidden up here."

The two detectives slewed round. The man Wilding was crouching a little to the right of Parbold.

But he appeared to be too busy to enjoy the effect he had produced. He was squinting through the eyepiece of a miniature motion-picture camera.

Chief-Inspector Parbold found himself flushing with anger, in which there was a good deal of discomfort at being made to look a fool before Inspector Gaillard.

"You had better explain, and quick," he snapped.

"Shut up, and just watch," Wilding snapped back, still focusing his camera. "Now! Look, man!"

As he spoke he started turning the machine. The two detectives stared out at the figures in the sea. They were still in fairly shallow water, Miss Livermore's tall figure as she stood being submerged only to her waist and Ellen's to her shoulders. They were laughing, Ellen obviously protesting about something, as uncertain swimmers will.

Wilding, still turning his machine, gave a low chuckle.

"Miss Livermore is persuading Ellen to let her teach her how to 'crawl.' "

"Well, what's wrong with that?" snapped Parbold. "It all looks quite innocent to me. If you are making monkeys out of us, Wilding ——"

"Cool off, Chief-Inspector — and if you are a good boy I'll teach you how to become a real detective one day."

Inspector Gaillard opened his mouth to rebuke such impertinence, but never got the words out. Parbold stiffened, entirely forgetting Wilding. With all his experience of crime and criminals, he was never to forget the next few minutes.

The enchanting sunlight, the lovely, tranquil sea embroidered with the red rocks, the faint echo of Ada Livermore's insane laughter, the eerie insistent click-click of the motion-picture camera in his ear. . . .

Gaillard said hoarsely: "My God — it's murder! She's drowning her!"

Chief-Inspector Parbold dashed forward into the bushes, whence he could climb down to the beach.

Wilding, still turning his machine, snapped, "Stay put, you fool. Ellen can take care of herself — she's only pretending to be a dud swimmer. Let me take this film so completely that no jury can have any doubt."

Ada Livermore's mad laughter had been succeeded by a tense, horrible silence. She was struggling with all her might to keep her grip on the ankles of the frantically struggling girl. For when Ellen had taken up the position to do the stroke she was about to learn, Miss Livermore had grasped her firmly by the ankles and raised them high, so that the girl's head had been instantly submerged. Ellen was making a fierce struggle for her life. But all the same, with her head well under water, and her legs held high in the stronger woman's grip, the end must come soon.

"Now!" shouted Wilding.

Ada Livermore was now pressing the ankles downwards, then up, then down again, obviously trying to dash the girl's head against the rocks below.

The two policemen scrambled down to the beach, shouting. Ada Livermore turned, and the girl's ankles at

once slipped from her surprised grasp. The two detectives dashed into the sea up to their shins, but then thought better of it as they saw Ellen's head come up. They could distinctly see Ada Livermore's face turned towards them with the blank, expressionless look of a sleep-walker.

Then the girl she had tried so callously to drown, panting though she still was, made the horrible scene look almost normal, almost comic, by her reaction. She waded to Ada Livermore and gave her a slap on the face so hard that it resounded right through the bay. Then she took the woman by the wrist and pulled her towards the beach. Ada Livermore, as though dazed, made no resistance.

Wilding, who had now joined the detectives, said to Inspector Gaillard, "You can charge her with attempted premeditated murder. And that will have to rest as the charge if she does not confess to the murder of Doris Childhood."

The two women were not quite close, wading towards them. Ada Livermore's expression was still that of a sleep-walker, she seemed neither to see nor hear anything. When Gaillard formally charged her, she looked at him dumbly and without understanding.

But a wave of crimson flooded her face when she heard Wilding formally introduce himself to the two police officers as Stanley Mason, private inquiry-agent employed by Lord Childhood. Her veiled blue eyes seemed to dilate and grow bright. Chief-Inspector Parbold found himself quite unable to look at her. In a low, hoarse voice, totally unrecognizable as that of the cultured governess they had known, she revealed the corruption of her soul in a stream of abuse.

Inspector Gaillard took her back to Cannes in the hired car. Parbold, unwilling to see more of the woman than necessary, went back with the inquiry-agent and his assistant in the Ford car, which Ada Livermore had parked round the bend of the bay.

The Childhoods had not been entirely satisfied by the "accident" explanation of their daughter's tragic death. Certain faint marks on her upper arms and shoulders might have been caused by physical violence immediately preceding the girl's fall down the stairs.

But they had no reason in the world to suspect Miss Livermore any more than any of the domestic staff. Through a friend they had engaged Stanley Mason, who had recently returned from Canada, where he had for many years enjoyed a lucrative practice as a private detective.

Mason, having eliminated all the servants as possibilities, concentrated on the governess and made inquiries into her past. Before coming to the Childhoods she had been in three situations, all of which she had left in the proper course of events and with the highest references.

But Mason discovered one significant "similarity" between these

three households. During Ada Livermore's employment in each one there had been cases of theft, both of trinkets and money in small amounts. Recently engaged servants had been dismissed on suspicion without proof, but in no instance had the frank and athletic governess been under any suspicion whatsoever.

Thereupon Stanley Mason, in his eagerness to expose a criminal so depraved as a child-killer, had made a long shot and formed this theory: that Ada Livermore was a money-maniac with a respectability complex — that is, she would commit any crime, even murder, if she could enrich herself without losing her standing as a respectable woman.

The Childhood crime then took shape in his mind's eye. Doris must have been awakened in the night by some noise. She had always been known as a fearless child. Not finding her governess in the next room, the door of which was always ajar, she had no doubt gone out into the corridor and found her in the act of leaving some room in which she could have no business. The rest of the tragedy, given Ada Livermore's "respectability" obsession, followed with unnatural logic.

But, convinced though he might be that there had been cold-blooded murder, how could he obtain proof? Or even confirmation?

He had decided that the only way to do this was *to entice the "money-maniac" to attempt another murder for money* — for "big" money this time, and not for the few banknotes she might steal from a guest's room in a large and hospitable household.

Thus Mason had evolved the plot of the widower in love who would be a rich man if only his stepchild was out of the way.

He told Chief-Inspector Parbold that his suspicions of Ada Livermore were immediately confirmed by her reaction to his casually dropped remark that all "the late Mrs. Wilding's" great fortune would revert to him if anything should happen to Ellen. At the time the governess had made no comment on this, but on several occasions later she had tried to draw him out with regard to his attachment to his stepchild. He had replied noncommittally and tried to give her the impression that an excessively noisy girl was not always the most agreeable companion for a man of fifty-four.

Four days ago, judging by her manner that he had provoked her greed sufficiently, he had told her that he might any day have to go to Marseilles. That very day she had borrowed his car on the excuse that she had wanted a lonely drive. He had followed her in a hired car, and seen her explore the lonely little bay near La Trayas.

Examining it himself after she had left, he had seen it must be an ideal spot for a murder which would look accidental. What could be easier than for a poor swimmer to slip and dash her head against those submerged rocks? Mason foresaw that Ada Liver-

more, after having convinced herself of the girl's death, would pull her out into much deeper water, and then, realistically pretending to be exhausted and battered herself, start a frantic screaming for help to attract the attention of a passing motorist along the coast.

Ellen, who had assisted him in several previous cases, was perfectly willing to take the risk. Mason, before going away on his pretended trip to Marseilles, had had an emotional half-hour with Ada Livermore in which he had told her that nothing in the world would make him happier than if he could but make a great fortune and lavish it on her as his wife. She had replied emotionally that she had finally made up her mind to marry him with or without money. And it was this which had convinced him of her intentions with regard to the picnic on the following day.

Stanley Mason's view was that if he could but catch the woman red-handed attempting murder, and with a film as added proof, her resistance might break down and lead her to confess to the Childhood murder.

He was proved right. Ada Livermore facilitated extradition to England by confessing to the murder of Doris Childhood. Doris had found her coming out of the room of a guest, who was known to drink port excessively, sleep heavily, and always have a plentiful supply of money in his pockets. The child, who had never liked her governess, was about to expose her then and there by her screams, and it was in the consequent struggle at the head of the staircase that Ada Livermore pushed the child down the stairs.

Ada Livermore was tried and condemned for murder at the Old Bailey in June last, in what was known for many days as the "Riviera Murder Case." No doubt it amused Stanley Mason, who liked to keep in the background, to hear that his friend, Chief-Inspector Parbold, was warmly congratulated, both by his colleagues and the Press, on the solution of so difficult a case.

NEXT MONTH . . .

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE will include two prize-winning stories:

CHALLENGE TO THE READER by *Hugh Pentecost*

THE HOUSE-IN-YOUR-HAND MURDER by *Roy Vickers*

and

DEAD YELLOW WOMEN by *Dashiell Hammett*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Harry Kemelman is one of the three new writers discovered by EQMM's Second Annual Contest. With two other beginners he was awarded a Special Prize for a first-published story. He is thirty-eight years old, married, and has three children. He graduated from Boston University in 1930 and took an M.A. at Harvard the following year. He became a teacher, planning to use the free time this profession presumably afforded in which to write; but the "free time" proved to be a delusion. He found out — a common but none the less bitter experience for many hopefuls — that he "had to teach at two or three different places in order to make one half-decent salary." In 1942 he entered government service (how many other writers have made the same fateful decision!). He was appointed Wage Administrator for the Boston Port of Embarkation, and did well at it — but again his work left him no time to write. When the war ended, he left government employ. Note his desperate and painful comment: "Government service offered security but I had begun to think that having security was a little like being dead. I wanted to try living by my wits for a while — and I wanted a real chance to write." He set up as a consultant Wage Analyst, rented an office, and while waiting for clients (as the young doctor A. Conan Doyle once waited for patients!), he writes. "The Nine Mile Walk" is the first story Mr. Kemelman finished under his new pattern for living, and it won a prize in our Second Contest. EQMM is proud to bring you this wonderfully promising story, prouder still to have been a source of encouragement to Mr. Kemelman in his courageous fight for a personal life, a personal liberty, and a personal pursuit of happiness, and proudest still to welcome all new writers to the happiest of professions. . . .

THE NINE MILE WALK

by HARRY KEMELMAN

I HAD made an ass of myself in a speech I had given at the Good Government Association dinner, and Nicky Welt had cornered me at breakfast at the *Blue Moon*, where we both ate occasionally, for the pleasure of rubbing it in. I had made the mistake of departing from my prepared speech to criticize a statement my predecessor in the office of District Attorney had made to the press. I had drawn a number of inferences from his statement and had thus left myself open to a rebuttal which he had promptly made and which had the effect of making me appear intellectually dishonest. I was new to this political game, having but a few months before left the Law School faculty to become the Reform

Party candidate for District Attorney. I said as much in extenuation, but Nicholas Welt, who could never drop his pedagogical manner (he was Snowdon Professor of English Language and Literature), replied in much the same tone that he would dismiss a request from a sophomore for an extension on a term paper, "That's no excuse."

Although he is only two or three years older than I, in his late forties, he always treats me like a schoolmaster hectoring a stupid pupil. And I, perhaps because he looks so much older with his white hair and lined, gnome-like face, suffer it.

"They were perfectly logical inferences," I pleaded.

"My dear boy," he purred, "although human intercourse is wellnigh impossible without inference, most inferences are usually wrong. The percentage of error is particularly high in the legal profession where the intention is not to discover what the speaker wishes to convey, but rather what he wishes to conceal."

I picked up my check and eased out from behind the table.

"I suppose you are referring to cross-examination of witnesses in court. Well, there's always an opposing counsel who will object if the inference is illogical."

"Who said anything about logic?" he retorted. "An inference can be logical and still not be true."

He followed me down the aisle to the cashier's booth. I paid my check and waited impatiently while he searched in an old-fashioned change purse, fishing out coins one by one and placing them on the counter beside his check, only to discover that the total was insufficient. He slid them back into his purse and with a tiny sigh extracted a bill from another compartment of the purse and handed it to the cashier.

"Give me any sentence of ten or twelve words," he said, "and I'll build you a logical chain of inferences that you never dreamed of when you framed the sentence."

Other customers were coming in, and since the space in front of the cashier's booth was small, I decided to wait outside until Nicky completed his transaction with the cashier. I remember being mildly amused at the idea that he probably thought I was still at his elbow and was going right ahead with his discourse.

When he joined me on the sidewalk I said, "A nine mile walk is no joke, especially in the rain."

"No, I shouldn't think it would be," he agreed absently. Then he stopped in his stride and looked at me sharply. "What the devil are you talking about?"

"It's a sentence and it has eleven words," I insisted. And I repeated the sentence, ticking off the words on my fingers.

"What about it?"

"You said that given a sentence of ten or twelve words —"

"Oh, yes." He looked at me suspiciously. "Where did you get it?"

"It just popped into my head.

Come on now, build your inferences."

"You're serious about this?" he asked, his little blue eyes glittering with amusement. "You really want me to?"

It was just like him to issue a challenge and then to appear amused when I accepted it. And it made me angry.

"Put up or shut up," I said.

"All right," he said mildly. "No need to be huffy. I'll play. Hm—m, let me see, how did the sentence go? 'A nine mile walk is no joke, especially in the rain.' Not much to go on there."

"It's more than ten words," I rejoined.

"Very well." His voice became crisp as he mentally squared off to the problem. "First inference: the speaker is aggrieved."

"I'll grant that," I said, "although it hardly seems to be an inference. It's really implicit in the statement."

He nodded impatiently. "Next inference: the rain was unforeseen, otherwise he would have said, 'A nine mile walk in the rain is no joke,' instead of using the 'especially' phrase as an afterthought."

"I'll allow that," I said, "although it's pretty obvious."

"First inferences should be obvious," said Nicky tartly.

I let it go at that. He seemed to be floundering and I didn't want to rub it in.

"Next inference: the speaker is not an athlete or an outdoors man."

"You'll have to explain that one," I said.

"It's the 'especially' phrase again," he said. "The speaker does not say that a nine mile walk in the rain is no joke, but merely the walk — just the distance, mind you — is no joke. Now, nine miles is not such a terribly long distance. You walk more than half that in eighteen holes of golf — and golf is an old man's game," he added slyly. *I* play golf.

"Well, that would be all right under ordinary circumstances," I said, "but there are other possibilities. The speaker might be a soldier in the jungle, in which case nine miles would be a pretty good hike, rain or no rain."

"Yes," and Nicky was sarcastic, "and the speaker might be one-legged. For that matter, the speaker might be a graduate student writing a Ph.D. on humor and starting by listing all the things that are not funny. See here, I'll have to make a couple of assumptions before I continue."

"How do you mean?" I asked, suspiciously.

"Remember, I'm taking this sentence *in vacuo*, as it were. I don't know who said it or what the occasion was. Normally a sentence belongs in the framework of a situation."

"I see. What assumptions do you want to make?"

"For one thing, I want to assume that the intention was not frivolous, that the speaker is referring to a walk that was actually taken, and that the purpose of the walk was not to win a bet or something of that sort."

"That seems reasonable enough," I said.

"And I also want to assume that the locale of the walk is here."

"You mean here in Fairfield?"

"Not necessarily. I mean in this general section of the country."

"Fair enough."

"Then, if you grant those assumptions, you'll have to accept my last inference that the speaker is no athlete or outdoors man."

"Well, all right, go on."

"Then my next inference is that the walk was taken very late at night or very early in the morning — say, between midnight and five or six in the morning."

"How do you figure that one?" I asked.

"Consider the distance, nine miles. We're in a fairly well-populated section. Take any road and you'll find a community of some sort in less than nine miles. Hadley is five miles away, Hadley Falls is seven and a half, Goreton is eleven, but East Goreton is only eight and you strike East Goreton before you come to Goreton. There is local train service along the Goreton road and bus service along the others. All the highways are pretty well traveled. Would anyone have to walk nine miles in a rain unless it were late at night when no busses or trains were running and when the few automobiles that were out would hesitate to pick up a stranger on the highway?"

"He might not have wanted to be seen," I suggested.

Nicky smiled pityingly. "You think he would be less noticeable trudging along the highway than he would be riding in a public conveyance where everyone is usually absorbed in his newspaper?"

"Well, I won't press the point," I said brusquely.

"Then try this one: he was walking towards a town rather than away from one."

I nodded. "It is more likely, I suppose. If he were in a town, he could probably arrange for some sort of transportation. Is that the basis for your inference?"

"Partly that," said Nicky, "but there is also an inference to be drawn from the distance. Remember, it's a *nine* mile walk and nine is one of the exact numbers."

"I'm afraid I don't understand."

That exasperated schoolteacher-look appeared on Nicky's face again. "Suppose you say, 'I took a ten mile walk' or 'a hundred mile drive'; I would assume that you actually walked anywhere from eight to a dozen miles, or that you rode between ninety and a hundred and ten miles. In other words, *ten* and *hundred* are round numbers. You might have walked *exactly* ten miles or just as likely you might have walked *approximately* ten miles. But when you speak of walking *nine* miles, I have a right to assume that you have named an exact figure. Now, we are far more likely to know the distance of the city from a given point than we are to know the distance of a given point

from the city. That is, ask anyone in the city how far out Farmer Brown lives, and if he knows him, he will say, 'Three or four miles.' But ask Farmer Brown how far he lives from the city and he will tell you. 'Three and six-tenths miles — measured it on my speedometer many a time."

"It's weak, Nicky," I said.

"But in conjunction with your own suggestion that he could have arranged transportation if he had been in a city —"

"Yes, that would do it," I said. "I'll pass it. Any more?"

"I've just begun to hit my stride," he boasted. "My next inference is that he was going to a definite destination and that he had to be there at a particular time. It was not a case of going off to get help because his car broke down or his wife was going to have a baby or somebody was trying to break into his house."

"Oh, come now," I said, "the car breaking down is really the most likely situation. He could have known the exact distance from having checked the mileage just as he was leaving the town."

Nicky shook his head. "Rather than walk nine miles in the rain, he would have curled up on the back seat and gone to sleep, or at least stayed by his car and tried to flag another motorist. Remember, it's nine miles. What would be the least it would take him to hike it?"

"Four hours," I offered.

He nodded. "Certainly no less, considering the rain. We've agreed that it happened very late at night or very early in the morning. Suppose he had his breakdown at one o'clock in the morning. It would be five o'clock before he would arrive. That's daybreak. You begin to see a lot of cars on the road. The busses start just a little later. In fact, the first busses hit Fairfield around 5:30. Besides, if he were going for help, he would not have to go all the way to town — only as far as the nearest telephone. No, he had a definite appointment, and it was in a town, and it was for some time before 5:30."

"Then why couldn't he have got there earlier and waited?" I asked. "He could have taken the last bus, arrived around one o'clock, and waited until his appointment. He walks nine miles in the rain instead, and you said he was no athlete."

We had arrived at the Municipal Building where my office is. Normally, any arguments begun at the *Blue Moon*, ended at the entrance to the Municipal Building. But I was interested in Nicky's demonstration and I suggested that he come up for a few minutes.

When we were seated I said, "How about it, Nicky, why couldn't he have arrived early and waited?"

"He could have," Nicky retorted. "But since he did not, we must assume that he was either detained until after the last bus left, or that he had to wait where he was for a signal of some sort, perhaps a telephone call."

"Then according to you, he had an

appointment some time between midnight and 5:30 —"

"We can draw it much finer than that. Remember, it takes him four hours to walk the distance. The last bus stops at 12:30 A.M. If he doesn't take that, but starts at the same time, he won't arrive at his destination until 4:30. On the other hand, if he takes the first bus in the morning, he will arrive around 5:30. That would mean that his appointment was for some time between 4:30 and 5:30."

"You mean that if his appointment were earlier than 4:30, he would have taken the last night bus, and if it were later than 5:30, he would have taken the first morning bus?"

"Precisely. And another thing: if he were waiting for a signal or a phone call, it must have come not much later than one o'clock."

"Yes, I see that," I said. "If his appointment is around five o'clock and it takes him four hours to walk the distance, he'd have to start around one."

He nodded, silent and thoughtful. For some queer reason I could not explain, I did not feel like interrupting his thoughts. On the wall was a large map of the county and I walked over to it and began to study it.

"You're right, Nicky," I remarked over my shoulder, "there's no place as far as nine miles away from Fairfield that doesn't hit another town first. Fairfield is right in the middle of a bunch of smaller towns."

He joined me at the map. "It doesn't have to be Fairfield, you know," he said quietly. "It was probably one of the outlying towns he had to reach. Try Hadley."

"Why Hadley? What would anyone want in Hadley at five o'clock in the morning?"

"The Washington Flyer stops there to take on water about that time," he said quietly.

"That's right, too," I said. "I've heard that train many a night when I couldn't sleep. I'd hear it pulling in and then a minute or two later I'd hear the clock on the Methodist Church banging out five." I went back to my desk for a timetable. "The Flyer leaves Washington at 12:47 A.M. and gets into Boston at 8:00 A.M."

Nicky was still at the map measuring distances with a pencil.

"Exactly nine miles from Hadley is the Old Sumter Inn," he announced.

"Old Sumter Inn," I echoed. "But that upsets the whole theory. You can arrange for transportation there as easily as you can in a town."

He shook his head. "The cars are kept in an enclosure and you have to get an attendant to check you through the gate. The attendant would remember anyone taking out his car at a strange hour. It's a pretty conservative place. He could have waited in his room until he got a call from Washington about someone on the Flyer — maybe the number of the car and the berth. Then he could just slip out of the hotel and walk to Hadley."

I stared at him, hypnotized.

"It wouldn't be difficult to slip aboard while the train was taking on water, and then if he knew the car number and the berth —"

"Nicky," I said portentously, "as the reform District Attorney who campaigned on an economy program, I am going to waste the taxpayers' money and call Boston long distance. It's ridiculous, it's insane — but I'm going to do it!"

His little blue eyes glittered and he moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue.

"Go ahead," he said hoarsely.

I replaced the telephone in its cradle.

"Nicky," I said, "this is probably the most remarkable coincidence in the history of criminal investigation: *a man was found murdered in his berth on last night's 12:47 from Washington!* He'd been dead about three hours, which would make it exactly right for Hadley."

"I thought it was something like that," said Nicky. "But you're wrong about its being a coincidence. It can't be. Where did you get that sentence?"

"It was just a sentence. It simply popped into my head."

"It couldn't have! It's not the sort of sentence that pops into one's head. If you had taught composition as long as I have, you'd know that when you ask someone for a sentence of ten words or so, you get an ordinary statement such as 'I like milk' — with the other words made up by a modifying clause like, 'because it is good for my health.' The sentence you offered related to a *particular situation.*"

"But I tell you I talked to no one this morning. And I was alone with you at the *Blue Moon.*"

"You weren't with me all the time I paid my check," he said sharply. "Did you meet anyone while you were waiting on the sidewalk for me to come out of the *Blue Moon?*"

I shook my head. "I was outside for less than a minute before you joined me. You see, a couple of men came in while you were digging out your change and one of them bumped me, as I thought I'd wait —"

"Did you ever see them before?"

"Who?"

"The two men who came in," he said, the note of exasperation creeping into his voice again.

"Why, no — they weren't anyone I knew."

"Were they talking?"

"I guess so. Yes, they were. Quite absorbed in their conversation, as a matter of fact — otherwise, they would have noticed me and I would not have been bumped."

"Not many strangers come into the *Blue Moon,*" he remarked.

"Do you think it was they?" I asked eagerly. "I think I'd know them again if I saw them."

Nicky's eyes narrowed. "It's possible. There had to be two — one to trail the victim in Washington and ascertain his berth number, the other to wait here and do the job. The Washington man would be likely to come down here afterwards. If there

were theft as well as murder, it would be to divide the spoils. If it was just murder, he would probably have to come down to pay off his confederate."

I reached for the telephone.

"We've been gone less than half an hour," Nicky went on. "They were just coming in and service is slow at the *Blue Moon.* The one who walked all the way to Hadley must certainly be hungry and the other probably drove all night from Washington."

"Call me immediately if you make an arrest," I said into the phone and hung up.

Neither of us spoke a word while we waited. We paced the floor, avoiding each other almost as though we had done something we were ashamed of.

The telephone rang at last. I picked it up and listened. Then I said, "O. K." and turned to Nicky.

"One of them tried to escape through the kitchen but Winn had someone stationed at the back and they got him."

"That would seem to prove it," said Nicky with a frosty little smile.

I nodded agreement.

He glanced at his watch. "Gracious," he exclaimed, "I wanted to make an early start on my work this morning, and here I've already wasted all this time talking with you."

I let him get to the door. "Oh, Nicky," I called, "what was it you set out to prove?"

"That a chain of inferences could be logical and still not be true," he said.

"Oh."

"What are you laughing at?" he asked snappishly. And then he laughed too.

ABOUT THE STORY: We began our editorial postscript to Q. Patrick's "Love Comes to Miss Lucy" by pointing out that, broadly speaking, detective-crime stories are divided into two classifications — stories of plot and stories of characterization, mood, and background. This is only one possible application of the theory of logical dichotomy. Another variation, which is just as true and yet does not in any way invalidate the first one, is to express it this way: that, broadly speaking, detective-crime stories can be divided into two classifications — the intellectual and the sensational. The intellectual genus comprises those tales which are based on pure detection and pure deduction. These are brain exercises in lethal logic. Usually they are leisurely in pace, constantly reminding us that the still waters of quiet entertainment can run deep, stimulating the mind if not the heart. On the other hand, the genus characterized as sensational is usually a homicide of another color: it may unravel a thread of deduction, but this mental man-

hunting is secondary to hard-hitting, bone-bruising, physical manhunting. The sensational type of detective story relies on speed of action, mounting thrills, and general violence of dramatic incident. Again it should be made clear that while in each form of detectival dichotomy the two divisions are all-inclusive, classic stories combining mental and physical excitement have already become a living heritage for future generations.

By way of clarification suppose we cite, among older stories written by Americans, two perfect examples of the successful fusion of techniques: Edgar Allan Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," besides being the world's first detective story in the modern sense, is still an unsurpassed literary mixture of the intellectual and the sensational; and Melville Davisson Post's "The Doomdorf Mystery" unites, merges, then consolidates ingenuity of plot and the deeper necessities of characterization, mood, and background.

Mr. Kemelman's "The Nine Mile Walk" belongs completely to the intellectual school. It is a fascinating study in sheer analysis, in unadulterated armchair detection. When this story passed through our staff of readers, it picked up only one adverse criticism. Perhaps you would be interested to know that critical objection; perhaps you had the same reaction yourself. In any event, here it is: one reader maintained that the transition between Nicky Welt's pure theorizing and the discovery that his hypothetical conclusions were absolutely true — the bridge, that is, between fancy and fact — was too sudden. In other words, the abstract became concrete, the academic became actual, too quickly.

This fault (if indeed it is one) could easily have been remedied. Before the telephone check-up was made, Nicky Welt could have voiced his conviction that the eleven-word sentence had not popped into his friend's head from nothingness, that subconsciously it must have been a string of words his friend had somehow overheard. Then, as in the story, the source of the eleven words could have been pinned down to the two strangers in the restaurant. But such a change in the text (a mere shifting of elements) would have telegraphed the punch — thrown away the thunder of that fine dramatic moment when, suddenly, almost without warning, the teller of the tale announces that a man was actually murdered in exactly the place and at exactly the time that Nicky Welt deduced out of thin air. No, your Editor decided to let Mr. Kemelman's original version stand. To startle and amaze is every writer's prerogative. . . .

Author's Solution to

THE CLUE OF THE BROKEN LEGS

by CLAYTON RAWSON

"After disarming and shooting Lasko," Merlini explained, "the blackmailer had to vanish. And with Miss Dawn on the sundeck outside the window and running footsteps approaching the only door, that was something of a trick. His first step was to shoot out the light, thus insuring that it couldn't be turned on again too soon. Then he dropped the gun by the body and flattened himself against the wall by the door. After Kingsley ran in, he merely stepped into the doorway behind him, pretended he'd just arrived, and —"

Foyle shook his head. "Theories are a dime a dozen."

"All right," Merlini said. "Here are some facts. Fact Number One: the other suspects are all in the high income tax brackets, leaving you as the only decent candidate for the blackmailer role. Fact Number Two: the blackmail payments began six months ago when you got Lasko his divorce evidence and discovered something that —"

"The D.A.," Foyle said, "will need a hell of a lot more than that."

"The best," Merlini smiled, "is yet to come. When you had to explain your presence here, you couldn't very well admit you came to blackmail Lasko. So — Fact Number Three — you said he'd phoned and asked for protection. But the telephone, as Brady and Marie both clearly stated, is *downstairs in the library*. At shortly after five, when you claim Lasko phoned you, he was confined with two broken legs to a wheel-chair in his study *on the second floor*. And that puts you, Mr. Foyle, in a chair of a different kind."

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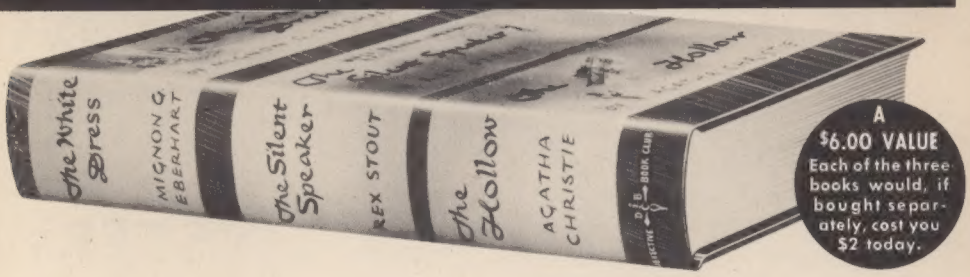

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